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*Julio Furenito*

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## Introduction

IT IS WITH THE GREATEST EMOTION that I approach a task which I regard as the goal and justification of my paltry life: to relate the life and thoughts of my Teacher, Julio Jurenito. Overwhelmed by the kaleidoscopic abundance of pitiful efforts on the part of a certain World Chronicler, now creating the history books of the future, my memory has become confused and senile; this process has been assisted, moreover, by the food shortage in Russia, particularly the lack of fats. The thought that many of the Teacher's judgments and stories are forever lost to me and the world fills me with dismay. But his image is vivid and alive. He stands before me, thin and frenzied, wearing his orange waistcoat and that unforgettable tie with green dots, smiling tranquilly. Teacher, I shall not betray you!

Sometimes, by sheer force of inertia, I still write poems of mediocre worth. When asked what my profession is, I shamelessly reply, 'a writer'. But all that belongs to the sphere of practical, everyday affairs: in substance, I have long since ceased to love and have abandoned that unproductive pastime. It would be most painful to me if anyone were to regard this book as a novel possessing greater or lesser entertainment value. That would mean that I had failed to carry out the task entrusted to me on that dark day of March 12th, 1921, the day of the Teacher's death. May my words be warm like his hairy hands; homely and lived-in like his waistcoat, saturated with the smell of tobacco and sweat, on which little Aysha so much loved to weep; quivering with pain and anger like his upper lip during one of his nervous fits.

I call Julio Jurenito by the simple, almost familiar name of 'Teacher', although he never taught anybody anything; he had no religious canons, no ethical code, not so much as a simple, tuppenny-ha'penny little philosophical system. I will say more:

he, the great pauper, did not even have that pathetic private income of the ordinary man-in-the-street: he was a man without convictions. I know that, compared with him, any little Member of Parliament will appear as a model of ideological steadfastness, any army quartermaster as the embodiment of honesty. When he violated all the bans imposed by the codes of law and ethics now in force, Julio Jurenito did not justify himself by any new religion or world concept. Before any court of justice in the world, including the revolutionary tribunal of the R.S.F.S.R. and the marabout-priest of Central Africa, the Teacher would appear as a traitor, a liar and the instigator of innumerable crimes. For who, if not the judges, should be the faithful watchdogs guarding the structure and order of this world?

Julio Jurenito taught us to hate the present and, in order that our hatred should be strong and hot, he opened before our thrice astonished eyes a chink of the door leading to the great and inescapable tomorrow. Many, on learning of his deeds, will say he was merely an *agent provocateur*. That is what sage philosophers and jolly journalists called him in his lifetime. But the Teacher, far from rejecting the honourable title, told them: 'The *agent provocateur* is the great midwife of history. The nine moons are up, and if you do not take me, the *agent provocateur* with the smile of peace on his lips and the fountain pen in his pocket, another will come to perform a Caesarean section, and it will go ill with the world.'

But our contemporaries will not, cannot accept this saint without a religion, this sage without a degree from the philosophical schools, this hero in prison garb. For what purpose, then, did the Teacher command me to write the book of his life? I was long tormented by these doubts, looking at the honest intellectuals, those imaginary readers of my book, whose ancient wisdom is ripened—after the fashion of French cheese—in the comfort of their studies, with Tolstoy's picture over the desk. But this perfidious memory came to my rescue. I remembered how the Teacher, pointing at the seed of a maple

tree, said to me: 'Yours is surer, for it flies not only into space but also into time.' And so I do not write for the craggy minds, not for the heights, not for the chosen of today, the fruitless and doomed ones, but for the lowlands of the future, for new earth upturned by another plough, on which, in blissful idiosy, will tumble and play his children, my brothers.

ILYA EHRENBURG



THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF

# *Julio Jurenio*

AND HIS DISCIPLES: MONSIEUR DELET  
KARL SCHMIDT, MR COOL, ALEXEY TISHIN  
ERCOLE BAMBUCCI, ILYA EHRENBURG  
AND AYSHA, THE NEGRO

In days of peace, war and revolution in Paris, Mexico, Rome, Senegal, in Kineshma and Moscow and in other places; as also various sayings of THE TEACHER on pipe-smoking, death, love, freedom, the game of chess, the tribe of Judah, construction and many other matters.





# I meet Julio Jurenito— the devil and a Dutch pipe

ON MARCH THE 26TH, 1913, I was sitting, as always, in a café on the boulevard Montparnasse in front of a cup of coffee, emptied long before, waiting in vain for somebody to set me free by paying the patient waiter six sous. I had discovered this method of nourishing myself during the preceding winter and it had proved brilliantly effective. Nearly always some unexpected deliverer would appear a quarter of an hour before closing time: a French poetess whose verses I had translated into Russian at some time or other; an Argentinian sculptor who, for some reason, hoped that I would help to sell his works to 'one of the princes Chtioukin'; a professional card-sharper of unknown nationality who had won a considerable sum from my uncle at San Sebastian and now evidently suffered pangs of conscience; finally, my old Nanny, who had come to Paris with her employers and, instead of at the Russian church (the one on the rue Daru), had fetched up at this café where Russian down-and-outs were often to be found, no doubt directed there by the absent-mindedness of a policeman who had misread the address. In addition to the canonical six sous, she—my old Nanny—made me a present of a large bun and, deeply moved, kissed me three times on the nose.

As a result perhaps of these unexpected rescues, or possibly under the influence of other circumstances—such as chronic starvation, reading books by Léon Bloy and various amorous upsets—I was in a most mystical mood and inclined to see omens from on high in the lowliest events. The adjacent shops—a grocer's and a fruiterer's—appeared to me as circles of hell; the moustached proprietress of the baker's shop, a virtuous woman of about sixty wearing her hair in a high chignon, an obscene

ephebe. I would work on a detailed plan for inviting three thousand inquisitors to Paris to attend the public burning of all those addicted to drinking aperitifs on the city squares. Then I would drink a glass of absinthe, become intoxicated, declaim poems by St Theresa, prove to the *patron*—inured to every queer sight—that Nostradamus had foreseen the Rotonde as the breeding-ground of deadly centipedes and, past midnight, go to knock in vain at the iron doors of the church of St Germain-des-Prés. My day would usually end in the room of my mistress, a Frenchwoman with solid professional experience but a good Catholic, from whom I would demand, at the most unsuitable moments, an explanation of how the seven ‘mortal’ sins differed from the seven ‘capital’ ones. And so, little by little, time went by.

That memorable evening I was sitting in a dark corner of the café, sober and entirely well-behaved. Next to me a fat Spaniard, completely naked, grunted and puffed, and on his lap twittered a bony young woman without breasts, also naked but wearing a wide-brimmed hat, which partly hid her face, and a pair of gold slippers. Other people in various stages of undress were seated all around, drinking *marc*. This spectacle, a fairly usual one for the Rotonde, was to be explained by the holding of a masked ball at some ‘Neo-Scandinavian Academy’. But to me, of course, all this seemed like the final mobilisation of Beelzebub’s forces, directed personally against me. I made all kinds of motions resembling those of swimming in order to ward off the sweating Spaniard and particularly the heavy hips of the nude model, which kept bulging in my direction. I gazed round the café, trying in vain to see the proprietress of the baker’s shop or someone who could replace her as the chief marshal and moving spirit of this monstrous rite. The door of the café opened and a very ordinary gentleman in a bowler hat and a grey rubber mackintosh walked in unhurriedly. The clientèle of the Rotonde consisted exclusively of foreigners, artists and plain tramps: people of eccentric outward appearance. Hence neither the Red Indian with chicken-feathers in his headdress,

nor my friend the music-hall drummer in his sand-coloured top hat, nor the little nude model—a half-caste in a bright peaked cap like a man's—attracted the slightest attention. But the gentleman in a bowler hat was a sight so unusual that the whole Rotonde quivered and fell silent for a moment, then broke into a murmur of astonishment and alarm. I alone understood it at once. And, indeed, it was enough to look closely at the newcomer to comprehend the very definite purpose of both the mysterious bowler hat and the loose grey coat. A pair of small horns rose steeply from the locks above his temples, while the coat strove vainly to cover a pointed, pugnaciously upraised tail.

I knew resistance was of no avail, and prepared myself for the end. Memories of long ago flashed through my head like tattered fragments: my parents' villa near Moscow smelling of wood resin; myself in a baby's bath, pink and defenceless; walks along Zubovsky Boulevard with Nadya from the high school; evenings in Siena on the edge of a ravine smelling of myrtle. But these last sweet visions were dispelled by the masterful, unconquerable tail.

I expected to be dispatched quickly, perhaps with jeers, perhaps with the traditional claws, perhaps quite simply by a command to follow him into a taxi. But the tormentor showed a rare gift of self-control. He sat down at the next table and, without even looking at me, unfolded an evening newspaper. At length, turning towards me, he opened his mouth to speak. Softly, almost lazily, he uttered '*Garçon, un bock,*' and a moment later a narrow glass was foaming on the table beside him. The devil drinking beer! I could not bear it. Politely, yet with emotion, I said to him: 'You need not wait. I'm ready. At your service. Here's my passport, a book of poems, two photographs, body and soul. I suppose we shall be going by car?' I repeat that I tried to speak calmly and in a business-like manner, as though my life and death were not at stake, for I had noticed at once that my devil was of a phlegmatic disposition.

Now, remembering that far-off evening which was my road to Damascus, I bow before the Teacher's clairvoyance. In reply

to my incoherent words Julio Jurenito did not lose his composure, did not call the waiter, did not go away: no, he looked quietly and clearly into my face and said: 'I know who you think I am. But he does not exist.' These words, which did not greatly differ from the usual sermons of the doctor who treated me for nervous disorders, nevertheless seemed to me a revelation, both wonderful and vile. The whole harmonious structure I had built was collapsing, for without the devil it was all unthinkable—the Rotonde, I myself, the good which existed somewhere. I felt I was about to perish and clutched at the last life-belt. 'But the tail, the tail . . .' Jurenito smiled. 'There is no tail—neither the Karamazov-Great Dane variety, nor the pointed kind. No tail. Try to get along without the tail. I see that you, like myself, are fond of pipes. I've got a splendid collection—English ones made of old 3-B briar, Hungarian cherry-wood, Turkish ones of Levantine red earth with jasmine mouth-pieces, Dutch ones.' I could not bear it and began to moan softly, staring with the last remnant of hope at the tail, which stuck out to the left of the speaker's legs. Then Jurenito unbuttoned his mackintosh and produced a long Dutch pipe, well smoked, from the side pocket of his trousers. I could hope for nothing further, for there was no longer a tail. More than that, he took off his bowler hat and the imagined horns turned out to be merely strong thick curls of hair, like a Negro's. In fear and torment I gazed at the involuntary deceiver, while Jurenito calmly lit his pipe.

I was by no means pleased that my enemy did not exist, that he was only my nonsensical invention. On the contrary, together with him vanished all hope of comfort, the comfort of hell perhaps, but still the comfort of something homely, tangible, open to comprehension. I felt I was in a desert and, searching for some stay among the shifting sands, I asked Jurenito: 'Very well, let us assume he does not exist. But *something* exists, doesn't it?' Julio smiled again, showing teeth which were so even and white that I remembered the poster in the trams saying 'Use Only Dentol', and replied politely, almost apologeti-

cally 'No'. This 'no' sounded as though I had asked him for a light or whether he had read the latest issue of *Comédia*.

'But surely, surely there is something to hold all this' together? Surely someone controls this Spaniard? Surely there is some meaning in him?'

'This Spaniard was born thirty years or so ago. At first he was hairless, then he grew some hair. He says he's an interior decorator but in reality he plays the stock market. Today he made forty louis. He's satisfied. His stomach functions well. The other organs too. Just now he's had dinner (three francs, *vin compris*) and taken a girl. Then he'll lose twenty louis on the stock exchange. Then he'll fall ill with the gout and drink stinking water. Then he'll die and rot and there'll be grass, common-or-garden grass, you know the kind. Beyond that, if it pleases you, go ahead and try and find a secret aim and a hidden meaning in it all. It won't cost you anything.'

'No,' I cried, unable to restrain myself, 'this cannot be! You haven't got a tail but you're *he* all right. There *is* good, do you understand? The eternal, the absolute!'

Jurenito did not lose composure and did not even raise his voice. 'Really, I do assure you I'm not the devil. You flatter me. Besides, those charming creatures don't exist, alas! You may sleep in peace. There's even no need for bromides. But there's no good either. And the other thing, the one with a capital G, also doesn't exist, my dear fellow. It's all an invention. They made it up for lack of anything better to do. What sort of a God can there be without the devil? "The good", you say? Well, take a look at this girl. She hasn't had any dinner today. Like yourself, you understand? She's hungry, she's got that empty feeling in her stomach, but she knows she mustn't ask. She's got to drink that sweet, sticky liqueur. It makes her sick. And the Spaniard makes her sick too; he's got cold wet hands that keep crawling about all over her body. She's got a little boy, he's with an old woman in the country, it costs her a hundred a month. Today she got a postcard, he's ill—the doctor, medicines and the rest of it. That means she's got to try and earn a

bit more. And *that* means being bright and cheerful: off to the ball with you—only not as Margot, mind (that's her name), but as Salammbo the Carthaginian—and keep kissing your Spaniard on the lips; those slippery oysters, quick, hard kisses, as if you're beside yourself with passion. Maybe he'll throw in another twenty sous. In short, an everyday story, silly stuff. But it's the kind of silly stuff to send all your saints and mystics flying head over heels. Of course everything's classified under headings: this is good, that's evil. The trouble is that somebody let a tiny error creep in, a misunderstanding if you like. Justice? In that case why didn't you invent a better landlord? One who'll see to it that this sort of thing doesn't happen on his farm? Or perhaps you believe that evil's a "trial", a "Redemption", you say? But that's a childish justification of far from childish things. That's how he "tries" the girl, is it? Well done, the All-merciful! Only why doesn't he try the Spaniard as well? Scales without weights. In the next life? Yes, yes! But where do you find it? On what map? So far the soul's an abstraction, but when you die your arms and legs begin to smell, then bones, then dust.' I sat for a long time saying nothing, crushed by these words. Then, suddenly, out of the meaningless, revolving chaos a point leapt out, tiny and black. I quickly clambered on to it.

'Very well, let's say there's no Creator, no meaning, no good, no justice. But there is nothingness. And if there's nothingness then there's also reality, meaning, spirit and a Creator.'

'My friend, you're incorrigible. Your "nothingness" hasn't got a tail either, has it? Yet the pipe's here, and I'm here, and the Spaniard. That's the whole joke: that everything exists and after it there's nothing. At this moment old John's dying and little Johnny's giving his first squeak. An hour ago there was rain, now it's dry again. It turns, it rotates, and that's all.'

'But it's impossible to live like that! It's vile, shameful . . . it's futile!'

'What can you do? You didn't choose it. You're faced with a *fait accompli*. A furnished house. Some like it very much and say it's comfortable, others hate it; but meanwhile all they do

is peacefully take the pictures off one wall and re-hang them on another.'

At that moment a magnificent, yet at the same time simple thought struck me. I think it must have come from Jurenito, and that was his first revelation to me. Paying no attention to the customers and waiters, I jumped up, pushed back my chair and cried: 'But surely it's possible to destroy the house?' Julio nodded and asked me to sit down again.

'A perfectly legitimate desire. Let's do it.'

He must be an anarchist, Spain's full of them, I thought, and asked in a whisper: 'A bomb? An infernal machine?'

'You're a delightful child,' said Jurenito. 'With a bomb you can cripple a pair of fat gendarmes, at best some king or other who collects Chinese figurines and adores playing tennis. No, we'll do something different.'

I understood that to question him further would be improper, and merely said, bowing ceremoniously: 'I shall be your disciple, faithful and zealous. But give me reality, or else, tonight or tomorrow morning, I might go mad.' He took a small meersch-chaum pipe out of his pocket and handed it to me. 'Fill it with good caporal tobacco and smoke it: there's reality for you.'

We dined together. After the cheese Jurenito ordered two glasses of Clos Vougeot and once more assured me that this—that is, the Clos Vougeot—was reality and not a dream. In the small hours at the 'Neo-Scandinavian Academy', after introducing me to a plump little Swedish girl dressed in a transparent tunic and resembling a fresh roll with fresh wet country butter on it, he said: 'This is real all right, not like that "good" of yours.' And he thumped me on the shoulder like a friend: 'Now good night! See you tomorrow!'

The Teacher's childhood  
and youth

IN THIS CHAPTER I wish to share with the reader those few and fragmentary facts I know about the life of Julio Jurenito before the memorable night when we met at the Rotonde. Sometimes the Teacher would tell me separate incidents from his boyhood years, and I shall try here to reproduce them and link them together, so that all should know that Jurenito was not a myth, not a fairy-tale hero, but the son of Pedro-Luis Jurenito, a sugar manufacturer from Guanajuata.

There have been many absurd legends about the Teacher's origins. The story that has come my way most often is that this tall, thin man with eyes of marvellous mobility, yet possessing the inconceivable power of bringing time to a stop, was an incarnation of Buddha. This legend came about as a result of the following incident, in itself an insignificant one. In March 1888, at the town of Allahabad in Central India, a valuable statue of the Buddha, dated by experts in the third or fourth century of our era, disappeared from the temple. This happened, in all likelihood, owing to the watchman's sleepiness and the predilection of certain British officials for Oriental antiques. Twenty-five years later the rumour was persistently heard in theosophical circles that the Buddha, having abandoned his former flesh, was re-incarnated in the Mexican, Jurenito, owing to which the image of his former personification had ceased to be visible. This legend enjoyed such success that once, when the Teacher spent the night in the studio of a certain Russian poet—a theosophist—a rather curious scene took place. At night the poet in his night-shirt crept across to the sleeping Teacher and started fingering his face. Caught in the act and mildly suspected of evil intentions, he explained that he was looking for a wart in the middle of Jurenito's forehead: the third eye which is the formal feature of Buddha's incarnations.



This and similar fables do not, of course, deserve the slightest credence.

The Teacher was born on March 25th, 1888, in Mexico, in the small town of Guanajuata, known for its gold mines. He was baptized according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church and received the names Julio-Maria-Diego-Pablo-Angelica. I fancy he was an inquisitive and uncomfortable child. It is known to me, for example, that as a five-year-old boy he sawed off a kitten's head with a bread knife, wishing to find out the difference between life and death. Two years later, having begun to doubt the Virgin Mary and many other things, he crept into the church, eviscerated a statue of the Madonna made of brocade stretched over a dummy, and remained wholly satisfied by the experiment.

At sixteen he fell in love and started looking at the stars and thinking about eternity. But, having enjoyed some temporal pleasures, he forgot about stars and eternity, hastily forsook the girl and, once and for all, lost any taste for what people call 'love'. Fortunately the girl was quickly comforted and married a contractor from Vera Cruz. Jurenito spilt no tears over this first love, but he sent a silver-plated dinner service of twelve covers to this, the only woman thus singled out by him in the whole of his life.

After this he went to seek gold at El Oro, but, reluctant to waste time on work in the mines, drank a jug of strong *pulque*, pulled out a respectable-sized knife and drew a line across the ground with it in front of a crowd of miners returning home from work, saying: 'Just for today this is the territory of Guanajuata, and none of you shall cross this line without paying me ransom, so bring out all your gold.' The people of El Oro were greedy but cowardly, and at the mere name of lawless Guanajuata they were willing to part with anything in the world merely to remain alive. An hour later Jurenito was making his way through the wooded mountains with a sack of gold. He bought a horse from the Indians and safely reached the frontier of the United States. This incident

was told me by a friend of Jurenito's and mine, the painter Diego Rivera, who had been at El Oro on the memorable day, had seen the line on the sand, the frightened miners and the lumps of gold in Jurenito's wide-brimmed hat with its leather strap.

In one of the Southern States the Teacher sold the gold for 8,000 dollars and then set about spending these, for which purpose he treated all the Negroes he met to gin, bought up rare postage stamps and commissioned articles in praise of himself in the most independent newspapers, illustrating the articles with pictures of suspicious-looking youths from the bazaars of Damascus. Thus, with great exertion, he succeeded in getting through six thousand, but could not manage the last two. Then he invited the rich but avaricious businessmen of the town to a gala dinner, after which, having handed round boxes of magnificent Corona cigars, he lit the remaining hundred-dollar bills twisted into tapers, so that all were able to light their cigars without striking a match. The businessmen crawled about on their knees, picking up the light, silvery ash. Their digestion was unquestionably disturbed, but Jurenito was relieved of the tedious pastime of spending money, of which he had become thoroughly tired.

This done, Jurenito again returned to Mexico and decided to occupy himself with the revolution. Those were the turbulent years of the young republic. Of all the parties Jurenito preferred Zapata and his naïve rebels, who hated urban culture, sugar-manufacturing machines, railway engines, and the men who carried death, money and syphilis. Carranza, after treacherously killing Zapata, snared Jurenito in a trap. Julio was saved by an accident. During the hours of waiting for death he experienced, instead of the solemn feelings described by poets, a strong sense of boredom and sleepiness, and after this experiment he set about killing others in a simple, everyday manner: he commanded the Indians in the famous battle of Celaya, where Villa's splendid army was routed. His courage, resourcefulness and talent aroused the admiration of Obregon, the

present President of the Mexican republic. But the overthrow of power, shootings and the pursuit of enemies, also turned out to be a monotonous and boring business. After the seventh revolution Jurenito bought a microscope, a set of drawing instruments and four crates of books and turned to scientific studies of various kinds. Soon afterwards he visited Lima and Buenos Aires, but he settled in New York.

Jurenito studied mathematics, philosophy, machine turning, electronics, hydrology, egyptology, playing the ocarina, the game of chess, political economy, versification and a number of other sciences, trades, arts and games. With exceptional ease he acquired command of languages. Here are the languages which he spoke quite faultlessly: Spanish, English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Arabic, Aztec and Chinese; and he had a working knowledge of dozens of others.

At the same time Jurenito occupied himself with the arts. I shall describe his work in this field in one of the later chapters.

All these pursuits failed to satisfy him and, after prolonged reflection, he decided—this was on September 17th, 1912—that culture was an evil and should be fought in every way, though not with the pathetic knives of Zapata's shepherds but with the weapons developed by culture itself. The thing to do was not to attack culture but to nurse its spreading ulcers, which would gradually consume its rotting body. And so that day became the date on which Jurenito grasped the essence of his mission: that of being a great *agent provocateur*.

The start of his career was marked by failure. Jurenito was too young, inexperienced in the ways of the world, and alone. He adopted the naïve course of persuasion, and arranged for illuminated posters to be projected on the night sky of New York by means of special contrivances. The inhabitants of that city well remember the striking start of Jurenito's activities. Majestically glowing letters, wiping the stars off the sky, proclaimed: 'You who hunger! Don't forget there are still grouse steaks. Glorify the gifts of civilisation!' and so on.

Everyone decided that this was part of a large delicatessen store's publicity campaign. But an Irish tramp, for some reason, threw a bomb into the smart Bristol restaurant that very night. They executed the Irishman by seating him in the electric chair, whilst Jurenito, unwilling to waste his time on provincial idylls of this kind, bought a ticket on the liner *Rex* and sailed away to Europe, where the ground was more favourable for his activities than in the excessively New and insufficiently civilised World. A few months after Jurenito's arrival in Europe I met him and became his first disciple.

That is all I know about the first twenty-five years of the Teacher's life. I should like to end this chapter with words of love for the country which bore the great man. Future generations will honour two countries: Mexico and Russia, where he ended his days and his work. Two towns will eternally attract the pilgrims: Konotop, the small and dirty, and distant Guanajuata.

Russia is my homeland too. I have never been to Mexico. But I have a deep love for that country, which is sacred to me. I love the little town on a hill with its houses rising in terraces, stern and bare, covered only with cacti and the black blotches of Quebra-Platos, the town to which fell the honour of being the Teacher's birthplace. With deep respect I repeat the names of the men whom Jurenito knew in the days of his youth: President Obregon, the outstanding engineer Paniqui, Rivera the painter, Morales the poet, and Vasconcellos the philosopher. If this book should ever reach them, may they accept my words of esteem and gratitude with trust. And if anyone who has read my book should ever have the happiness of seeing Guanajuata with his own eyes, may he kiss her sombre, hot and blessed soil for me.

## Dollars and the Bible— three days in the life of Mr Cool

A FEW DAYS LATER Jurenito came to see me early in the morning and immediately, without even saying good morning, held out to me a copy of the *Petit Parisien* with an advertisement marked in pencil. In the section headed 'miscellaneous', between an advertisement for a new laxative for hens suffering from diphtheria and a letter from someone called Paul to his 'pussy-cat' who unjustly suspected him of infidelity and to whom he would remain faithful to the grave, stood the following:

Missionary Co. for the Propagation of the Bible among the  
Natives of Europe, Inc.

(San Francisco - Chicago - New York)

### REQUIRES

active missionaries for various countries, and also agents  
for the sale of patent appliances.

Apply to:— Hôtel de la Croix, 10, Mr Cool.

'Don't you see this comes just at the right time?' said Jurenito (on the very first night after dinner he had begun to address me with the familiar *tu*, thus establishing a tone of friendship and at the same time of command). Half an hour later we were seated together in Mr Cool's study. His face, broad, flat and well-fed, conveyed nothing in particular. What was unusual were his feet, in pointed, reddish shoes, which rested on two cunningly rotating pedestals, somewhat higher than the level of his head. He was simultaneously reading the Bible, dictating a letter to the Minister of Fine Arts of the Republic of Chile to a shorthand-typist, listening to yesterday's cattle prices over the telephone from Chicago, chatting with us, smoking a fat cigar, eating a soft-boiled egg and looking at the photograph

of a plump actress. His armchair, which resembled a dentist's, was equipped with all kinds of lathes, tubes, mechanical holders in the shape of ladies' fingers, and a whole keyboard of incomprehensible buttons. This way of life had naturally left its imprint on Mr Cool. Later on I noticed, for example, that he tended to apply the methods of a telephone conversation to ordinary intercourse. One night, sitting alone in a restaurant and feeling bored, he suddenly barked at a passing actress: 'Hello! Woman? Cool speaking. Are you free? Want to come with me? Hello! let me have an estimate. I'm offering a dinner and ten dollars'. Sometimes he felt an urgent need to press his push-buttons, and this perfectly understandable habit had a distressing effect on the people around him. But generally speaking he was a rather well-mannered person, and he received us courteously, acquainting Jurenito at once with the substance of his intentions.

Having lived a fair number of years in his native America, Mr Cool had learned from tourists and newspaper articles that Europe was devoid of morality and organisation. In Europe, those two mighty levers of civilisation—the Bible and the dollar—did not go together. It occurred to Mr Cool that America must show her gratitude for that great moment when the sailor Juan Luis, a bandit known in the two Castiles, mumbled a prayer before cutting an Indian's throat, sprinkled him with sea water and thus laid the foundations for the triumph of the Cross. Now it was America's turn to save demented Europe. In order to put this into effect Mr Cool promoted an incorporated company with very substantial basic capital and, on his arrival in Europe, started working out a plan of action. Having explained all this to the Teacher he pressed the smallest of the push-buttons and, taking out various drafts from the files which popped up before him, read them out to us. Some of these have stuck in my memory and I will quote them here, though unfortunately without details, figures and drawings.

(1) It is necessary to put an end to thieving, but not merely by repressive measures. For this purpose it is necessary to

protect the infirm souls of the poor from the temptations of city life by reminding them of the eternal bliss which is accessible to all. The Missionary Co. Inc. manufactures various inspirational posters: fiery circles with the words 'Man does not Live by Bread Alone' to place over the entrances of bakers' shops, 'Blessed be They that Thirst' over the beershops, 'God's Kingdom is Within Us' over clothing shops, etc.

- (2) All brothel keepers should be obliged to instal automatic machines supplying the appropriate hygienic requisites. The packages should bear the words 'Friend, Remember your Pure and Innocent Bride at Home'. These automatic machines, according to Mr Cool, were a highly profitable business, yielding up to 1000 francs clear profit a month.
- (3) Memorandum to the Minister of Justice of the French Republic. Having several times visited the vicinity of the Santé prison during executions, Mr Cool is glad to note a large gathering of onlookers and an acutely developed sense of justice manifesting itself in unconcealed enthusiasm at the sight of this instructive ceremony. He notes the initiative of small traders, who set up stalls round the prison for the sale of sweets during the execution, as well as refreshing drinks and even toys for children brought along by their intelligent and energetic mothers. Mr Cool wonders, however, why these festive occasions are not utilised for moral propaganda, and, fully understanding certain peculiarities of the French secular State, suggests that the Missionary Co. Inc. be entrusted with organisation rights. Transportable stands to be erected round the guillotine with admission prices within the means of even the working population. Shops selling, apart from the usual goods, photographs of the criminals before and after the judiciary act, books of spiritual and moral content, and opera glasses for hire. After the conclusion of the official part of the festival, a film showing the childhood of the criminal and of a good citizen: the first is naughty, then steals, then rapes, then kills, then a

shot of his severed head in the hands of the esteemed M. Deibler; the other saves the sous he is given to spend on chocolate—marries—savings book—private income—a shaded grave and a memorial headstone 'in perpetuity'. All this followed by a brief sermon which may satisfy the requirements of the secular part of the audience: the criminal has neglected his school, society, his duties as an elector, and the higher Being known as *La Patrie*. The festival ends to the strains of the *Girl's Prayer for a Villain's Soul* and the *Marseillaise*.

- (4) Foreseeing the possibility of wars after the Morocco conflict, Mr Cool fears the pollution of millions of Christians by the shedding of blood, and therefore proposes to all European States having colonies in Africa to proceed with the creation of black armies. In his opinion, taking adults from the villages by force is cruel and, above all, unpractical. Experience with oysters, ostriches and various other kinds of animals suggests the idea of breeding-grounds. You pick the females of the most fertile tribes and thirty years later any State can have its own army, completely ready for use, without violating the moral feelings or the economic interests of its own population.

Having acquainted us with these bold and original projects Mr Cool complained to the Teacher about the ignorance of Europeans. The Minister of Justice had not answered his letter. His automatic slot-machines were installed in many brothels but the inspirational texts had been carefully smeared over with blacking. The electric anti-theft signs put up in London had been destroyed during the night by ill-wishers—no doubt Russian anarchists. Finally, instead of 'black breeding-grounds', peace congresses and conscription laws were all the rage. That was why he had decided to build up a staff of experienced and energetic agents with the help of newspaper advertisements.

Jurenito expressed his admiration and astonishment at the power and revolutionary character of Mr Cool's ideas. Modestly but not without dignity he referred to his career as a missionary in Mexico, and offered his services. His brief speech made so



strong an impression on Mr Cool that the latter, pushing aside his egg and ceasing to listen halfway through the latest list of prices for rams, cried: 'You're a great man too! Hello? You shall be my guide through Europe. Expense account, etc. Hello? Let me have an estimate'. We bowed and withdrew.

A deep abyss lay between yesterday and today. Having lost my all, I did not mistake Mr Cool for the devil, despite his suspicious-looking feet, push-buttons and files. Yet he seemed to me excessively repulsive and more dangerous than the breadshop proprietress or the Spaniard. I said as much to the Teacher. Jurenito agreed. 'Of course he's utterly vile, but in my choice of disciples I am not guided by my stomach's reaction to them but by the degree of their usefulness to the cause. In order that you may understand the force concealed in that man, we shall spend the next three days with him. Watch and learn. It will be much more instructive than all the visions of hell of our Lenten saints.'

Teacher, you were right as always! What are all the bonfires of Saint Ignatius, what is all the spiritual fire of our own Zosima compared with those three days, when the chief parts were played by the clock hand and the small blue cheque-book in Mr Cool's side-pocket? They have passed by, rapid and inexorable, and their memory resembles a strip of film.

Tuesday. At 1 p.m., after lunch, Mr Cool drives to an exhibition. His attention is attracted, among other things, by some Cubist still-lives by a young painter called Dorot. Two cups, a cucumber and a head of cabbage, broken up into planes. Jurenito explains. Mr Cool is obviously indignant. 'This is coarse materialism! Hello? Immorality! Spiritual degradation! A cucumber in the hands of the Madonna, that I can understand. A spiritual cucumber! What do you say this is? Form? Hello! Corruption! I'm buying.' He takes out his cheque-book. He buys all Dorot's canvases from the gallery owner. 3 p.m. The painter, radiant, delivers all his paintings at Mr Cool's hotel. Twenty-eight of them. The cheque-book again. Whereupon, in front of Dorot's eyes, two Negro servants immediately

proceed to cut the canvases into tiny pieces. 'Hello, young man, you must give up art. Here, this is beautiful and moral.' (Points at six washed-out blondes under a cypress). 'That isn't a Dorot, that's a 'what's-his-name?' (Jurenito whispers: 'Maurice Denys'). 'With the money I've paid you, buy a small china shop or try selling my patent slot-machines. Hello? Objections are useless. Anything you paint I shall buy up through my agents and destroy at once. Protest? But they're my property. I've bought them. I can do with them as I please. The dollar, my friend, a higher force. The dollar and the Bible.' 5 p.m.: Stop press of the *Intransigent*: the young painter Dorot has hanged himself. Causes unknown. At 6 p.m. Jurenito, on behalf of Mr Cool, orders a funeral wreath with the inscription: 'Fear not the destroyers of the body, for they cannot kill the soul'.

On Wednesday Mr Cool decides to try his hand at politics. He reads in the morning paper that the workers at a wallpaper factory at Meudon near Paris have been out on strike for a fortnight, united to a man, demanding a reduction of their working day by one hour. The solicitude of the lowest strata of the population for their own coarsely materialistic interests and their contempt for the spiritual world have always aroused Mr Cool's indignation. At 11 a.m. he is already receiving some private detectives who have detailed information on the four members of the strike committee. Having received their instructions they set to work. They invite Pierre Granier, an alcoholic, for a few drinks. By 5 p.m. he has received a dozen kicks and is lying dead drunk in a closet. Bideau has a consumptive daughter, the pet of the family. Offer of a trip to the South. A quarter of an hour's soul-searching and a leaf from the same blue cheque-book. Bideau leaves for Nice by the 8.20 train. Old Bedier is intimidated by photographs of prison, a tale of intercepted orders and some decorations donned expressly for this purpose by one of the dicks. He runs off to Paris to join his nephew. The only one left is Lize, who doesn't drink, won't accept money and isn't afraid of decorations. At

3 p.m. a long consultation in Mr Cool's office. The dicks demand a double fee. The cheque-book again? At 7 p.m. a meeting of the strikers. It turns out that three of the ringleaders have fled and Lize, the fourth, is in prison: a thousand dollars have been found under his mattress and he was unable to explain where they came from. 'Thief!' 'He was bribed!' 'Down with Lize!' The owners' representative, an old overseer, explains helpfully: 'Go back to work, no one will be victimised'. General rejoicing. The strike is over. Mr Cool commissions a memorial board but hesitates in his choice of a text. He inquires by wireless of a friend, Pastor Bones in Chicago, whether a slight modification in the Scriptures is permissible in view of the replacement of the feudal structure of society by capitalism. The answer is satisfactory. The text over the factory gates will be: 'Give to God that which is God's and to the boss that which is the boss's'.

Thursday. Spring. Mr Cool is in a playful mood. He's taking off. 'Love, love, you stir the blood!' A charming girl. Hello! Who's this? Junior salesgirl from the glove department of the Louvre. Call yesterday's dicks. Noon. Mademoiselle Lucie turns out to have a fiancé, Monsieur Paul, an employee of the Crédit Lyonnais. Find out his weaknesses. At 5 p.m. Monsieur Paul loses 1,800 francs at baccarat. At 6 p.m. he comes to meet Lucie outside the shop. They part at her door, the girl weeps. At 8 p.m. she receives a note inviting her to call at the Café Royal, private room No. 8, where she will immediately receive 1,800 francs. We drive to the restaurant with Mr Cool. A beggar outside asks for a few sous. Once again I am amazed by the energy of our new friend; turning to the beggar he raises his arms to heaven: 'Courage, my friend, in the next life the last shall be first'. Inside the café Jurenito and I stay in the public rooms. An hour later we are joined for a minute by Mr Cool, full of *joie de vivre* as always, making out a cheque to Mademoiselle . . . for 1,800 francs. After a moment's reflection he writes on the reverse of the cheque: 'Love pardons all (Corinthians 13, 5)'.

Thus passed our three days with Mr Cool. Leaving the café at night with the Teacher I was troubled. There was a smell of warm rain, the chestnut buds were swelling and my heart throbbed with the joy of living. I remembered Dorot, blue and with his tongue protruding; Lize being kicked along by the gendarmes; and finally, the way in which little Lucie, under the mocking glances of the waiters, vainly tried to cover her red little nose with powder in the vestibule of the café: I remembered it all and could not contain myself.

‘Tell me, why have you not killed Cool?’

Jurenito laughed. ‘My dear friend, who’d smash his gun when he’s just off to fight? Remember, we want to destroy everything. Cool is first-class heavy artillery.’

That is how Mr Cool, without knowing it (for he regarded Jurenito as his guide and regularly paid him 100 dollars a month), became the great Teacher’s second disciple.

## CHAPTER IV | The kind gods of Aysha- the Teacher's views on religion

ONE MORNING at the Hotel Majestic, after writing more than twenty business letters, Julio Jurenito rang for a pageboy to take them to the letterbox. Being in a hurry and wanting to stick the stamps on quickly, he told the Negro boy to put out his tongue. This method of stamp-sticking satisfied them both, and the next day the pageboy came without being called, took up his position by the side of the desk and obligingly put out his rough, pointed tongue. When the procedure was completed he said proudly to Jurenito: 'Gikhray can do that too'. In reply to our questions he invited us trustingly to follow him. We went into a cramped, dirty closet under the backstairs where the pageboy lived. On the floor we saw a small Negro idol recently made out of the shell of a coconut. He sat with his legs crossed and a postage stamp was stuck on his outstretched tongue. Aysha (that was the pageboy's name) gazed at the idol with a mother's tenderness, repeating: 'Gikhray is very clever, he can do anything'. Then we saw two more idols; one of them was cleaning shoes, the other stood in front of a door with a fragment of a mirror set in it. It transpired that Shirik and Gmekho (those were the names of Gikhray's two brothers) were also omnipotent and capable of doing complicated things surpassing human understanding. The Teacher was pleased and almost excited. 'You see,' he said to Mr Cool and myself, 'here, at the Hotel Majestic, a splendid mythology is being created. In hundreds of years' time Shirik will be shaking the earthly dust off the souls of the dead, Gmekho will be letting them pass through the holy gates, and dear old Gikhray with his five-sou postage stamp will be the eternal messenger linking our world with the transcendental. Have you forgotten the

after-dinner stories of the wise Hellenes, and the houris delivered without charge to the poor camelherd? You, a Hebrew,' he said to me, 'do you not remember how Jehovah was insulted by your maidens, how he fought with Jacob, was jealous if Israel so much as cast an eye at a Babylonian idol, and bargained over wretched Sodom? And you, Mr Christian, have you not endowed your God with all the features of humanity from birth to death, merely obscuring them a little by some slight deviations from physiology? That poor little housewife of Raphael's—who, incidentally, fulfilled her conjugal tasks with the utmost virtue—how many pious tears has she produced among Germany's hopeless old maids in her Dresden perpetuation! Has mankind invented for its multi-racial Olympus any rules other than those of the Chinese Empire or the Republic of San Marino? (The monarchy of Judah, the oligarchy of India, the plutocracy, finally, of the good Catholic's thousands of saints grown rich on the proceeds of their saintliness). Some alleviate the tyranny of justice by the constitutional intervention of mercy; others, on the contrary, solemnly restore autocracy. The heavenly ministries: the ministry of war with various ranks of seraphim, cherubim, angels and archangels; that of justice with its courts, prosecutors and defence counsel, its alleviating circumstances, shopkeeper's scales, forced labour for a limited period and in perpetuity; that of education with its prophets, propaganda and, even its illuminated signs on the walls of the palace at Babylon, etc. You, my children, are chewing the cud which has passed through all the four lawful stomachs, and Aysha is preparing a new one for the Claudels and the Bulgakovs of the thirtieth century.'

Aysha listened to the Teacher as though in a trance, his mouth again wide open, but this time for no practical purpose. The wealth of mysterious words and splendid names so amazed him that he fell on his knees and kissed the toe of Jurenito's shoe. The Teacher said to him: 'From now on you shall follow me everywhere.' 'What a pity I didn't know, I'd have found you a better valet,' said Mr Cool.

I asked the Teacher why he had chosen the little Negro. 'He believes,' said Jurenito; 'and that is as rare in your Europe as a good-looking virgin or an honest statesman. Your faith is cowardly for it casts a shadow of doubt and irony, schoolboy curiosity and the calculation of a shopkeeper afraid of making a loss on his wares. Find me an abbot who does not consult a natural history textbook on the sly to find out the size of a whale's throat, or try to explain the virgin birth by the complicated symbolism of a fashionable philosopher. Your atheism is no braver than your faith, for in its wake creep superstition, conversions half an hour before death, the works of Steiner, all the eternal begging at the doors of the insurance company. Your atheists rant and roar when they've got a glass of vermouth inside them, but later remembering the smell of a cemetery on a summer's noon, they make sure the gospels are close at hand just in case, talk about the elusive spirit (a vague gesture with the hands) and stay awake all night if their wife happens to break her dressing-table mirror. I am taking Aysha because in him lives faith, naked, unshamed, all-gladdening, and it will be a strong weapon in my hands. Others will see in me a teacher or an adventurer, a sage or a charlatan, but for him I will be a god, who knows how to stick on stamps and speak extraordinary words, whom he will carve, draw and model, and to whom he will remain faithful until his last breath.'

Thus spoke the Teacher. Mr Cool, carried away by these thoughts, tried in vain to wax indignant and, finally, in order to justify himself and his smile of sympathy for so immoral an attitude, said: 'My friend, I know you're only joking. I'm quite sure you're a good Christian, and a splendid guide besides', and he nudged Jurenito's side affectionately with a fat fist.

Later the Teacher came back repeatedly to questions of faith, creeds and religions. He spoke of them—as he did of other so-called important questions—in a jocular, flippant manner. The Teacher maintained that the only subjects on which you can talk seriously—academically, with a catch in your

throat or with a bibliography, from the bottom of your heart or with quotations from German authors—were methods of breaking in a new pipe, various kinds of spitting (with or without a whistling sound), and the structure of the inimitable Charlie Chaplin's legs. In all other cases he preferred a smile to a prayer and a jolly newspaper article to a standard work in many volumes. 'When the whole garden has been explored long since,' he used to say, 'it's futile to walk up and down the paths with an earnest air and a pocket flora. Only by playing, skipping aimlessly among the flowerbeds while thinking about a kiss you should have received but didn't, or about another helping of whipped cream, might you accidentally stumble across a new flower.'

In striving to reproduce Julio Jurenito's diverse sayings about faith I fear that, by reason of my nature which is lugubrious and lumpish, I may invest them with a false, deliberate seriousness. In fact, these thoughts were light and innocent like the twitterings of a sixteen-year-old maiden on various systems of proportional representation.

One day, transporting Gikhray's brothers—Gmekho and Shirik—from the closet at the Majestic to his studio, the Teacher said: 'They'll be comfortable between Christ in a Castilian skirt and a bronze Buddha stroking his belly with his finger. Gods are all splendid, equal and worthy of one another. But you hope in vain to remain on Aysha's level. He has only just made his god, like a young poet who has just written his first poem; he is excited, he feels he must run and tell everybody about it, the umbilical cord still dangles, there's life in him, everything. But you—you have the works of some genius or other who died and rotted away five hundred years ago—or a thousand, or two thousand—bound in manila cloth (leather corners, initials)—the schoolboy crams his lessons you accord your respect but not your interest; only very, very rarely, in the dentist's waiting-room, when you're very bored, do you reverently open the two-hundred-and-forty-sixth edition. For you God isn't bread, isn't life, not even a luxury object, but



some sort of a jar with ointment in it on the bathroom shelf (who was it that prescribed it, and for whom? the prescription was lost long ago), which you don't throw out only because it's stood there so long that you've ceased to notice it.'

'Of course,' the Teacher remarked one day, 'those experiments with Job were rather risky. Today no doubt the antivivisection society would have brought both contestants to justice. But at least there was decent compensation for the material losses, sickness, death of wife, children and cattle. True, they didn't get quite as far as resurrecting the old wife, but they produced a new one, and a very fertile one at that. Possibly Job even gained on the transaction. In any case, virtue triumphed. But what can be said of Berg, Berg the old furrier, who was more virtuous than Job himself, praised God's justice day and night and was found with his belly slit open on a rubbish heap at Balta? His children will be happy, you say? His grandchildren? Yes, yes, even unto the twentieth generation. And yet he must be at least the thirtieth of his line whose belly they've slit open, and how neatly they do it, with never a miss! The Almighty winning a bet again? But why do millions of Bergs have to perish just to satisfy His uncontrollable gambling instinct? No, there's clearly something wrong here. Even a little child knows that Ivan the honest, the diligent, the kind and all the rest of it, will swell up and die of hunger in the backyard of Ivan the thief, the liar and villain, who won't bat an eyelid, and there won't be any contrition, no crawling about on all fours, no mortal sweat to satisfy public opinion—nothing. Everything's been investigated to the very end and nothing in the least comforting has been found.

'Then they turn to things which are rather more difficult to investigate. The earth, very well; but what's above the earth? Justice, Redemption. It could be, of course, that there's nothing but dust and steam, but what if there's something else? Who knows? A man will live year after year, there's cholera all round, railway accidents, the Japanese, and still he goes on living. Then he eats a roach in sour cream, chokes on a tiny

bone and that's the end. Who knows if it isn't ordained from on high? An accident, but what if the accident's a clever one with a degree in theology and a diploma conferring on it the title of Providence? An old woman kneels in church, praying to her "ever-merciful Lady": the brown cow's in calf—what shall it be? Mother of God, please let it be a heifer! (for the calf's sins). St Genevieve instead of the old woman, the Goths instead of the calf, and there's your fresco by Puvis de Chavannes. So much for earthly things, but what's above? That's still more doubtful. But uncertainty is a stick with two ends. Anybody would rather send so important a letter by registered post, especially if the post office is run so badly. Then the books, the schools . . . Atheism's rampant. In other words, the currency of the kingdom of heaven has been devalued till it can fall no lower. The cashier fades and is swallowed up by the very mists which created him.'

Another time the Teacher spoke to us of the influence of sex on religion: 'Priapus's mad bull is slaughtered. If you don't put a mare in foal at the right time she'll fall sick. There are no tomcats in love with bitches, and not even the most sophisticated fox terrier will go courting a ewe. We do it differently. Since the peak is the beginning of the descent, and sensuous anticipation is longer and sweeter than the spasms of passion, many seek satisfaction in celibacy. The image dissolves quickly on the bed, even if there's momentary satisfaction, but on the wall it remains intact. The fragile maiden in the nuptial bed (when the others talked about it, it all seemed so much better), that's quick, clear-cut and not to everyone's taste. Besides, he does snort so. Whereas the other one, with the golden curls, mortally sad, inaccessible . . . Oh, be quick, be quick and build white almshouses with brass candlesticks and starched curtains! You priests behind your screens, you'll hear millions of sighs and vows in your confessionals of which the farmers and the brewers dream in vain. Never mind if occasionally there's a little cheating, a certain return to Mother Nature. And they, those who snort and those who do not, first maddened by the

armpit smells, then feeling slightly sick, have they never composed verses about the heavenly beauty of that other, glorious, inconceivable one, who needs no musk? Have they not depicted her on every piece of wood and scrap of canvas? I have seen, at Ganajo near Burgos, a shepherd, a dull-witted youth of about twenty, who castrated himself with a regal gesture before her image in the village church, and died an hour later in a torrent of blood. He's an exception, for the others produce only torrents of lecherous saliva or of the ink of exaltation. What of the secret obscene sects; what of criminal kisses on the lips of ikons; what of old nuns who, in the evening, wipe the dust off the statues; what of old Verlaine crawling from the wrinkled dirty whore to the tender stone maiden with a rose in her hand?'

Once, at Leyden, we went with the Teacher into a Protestant church. On the bare walls there hung only an almsbox and the Sunday-school timetable. The pastor was speaking eloquently about the Saviour's morals and the harmfulness of strong drink. The Teacher said to us: 'These poor people, they have once more repeated the gesture of the child which tears the ribbons and the bells off the toy to find nothing but a handful of stuffing inside. They were given the beautiful doll of Rome. They failed to understand that its deepest meaning was in the lace of its ritual, the silk of its dogma, the susurrations of the mass, the rouge and gilt of the crown. They began tearing off the robes, ripping up the vestments, afraid that the living flesh would become vestments, not realising that under the kisses of human lips vestments become words, words, that the words become tremulous and warm, and that there is no flesh beyond that. They have stripped the cabbage, leaf by leaf, and solemnly erected before them the stalk, the moneybox and the Herr Pastor with his disapproval of Schiedam (which, incidentally, is a splendid drink)'.

When, in Paris in 1913, they organised a 'Society for the Rational Administration of Petty Trade', Julio Jurenito in his capacity as owner of a coral-necklace shop turned up at the

inaugural meeting and made a proposal to place the society under the high patronage of the Apostolic Church. 'Nowhere,' he said, 'nowhere have I seen such solicitude, such a touching and yet rational attitude towards petty trade as within the walls of the church. As there exist mortal and venial sins, so there are expensive and cheap indulgences. The church has eradicated from memory the concept of "free of charge", so dear to idlers and parasites, so hateful to us. Back in Athens some tuppenny-ha'penny philosopher maintained that it was possible to do good for the sake of good. The church said "no". Nothing is done for nothing. For every bit of good, a ticket. (Security is the whole heavenly estate.) For sins, you pay. A genuflection, a hundred genuflections, a candle for two sous or forty sous, build a chapel, go to Lourdes, to Santiago, to Rome. We shall stand under the holy protection of St Peter, in whose charge are those objects dear to our hearts—account books, scales and strong keys to fit Yale locks.' The end of Jurenito's speech was drowned in applause but his proposal was not put to the vote, owing to a protest by the owner of a rubber-goods shop, who insisted on the absolutely secular nature of the 'society'.

In teaching us, his disciples, Jurenito liked to show us various specimens of different human types. I was always amazed by the innumerable people with whom he maintained friendly, business, or—in the majority of cases—vague and apparently aimless relations. For example, in Ghent he introduced us to a certain Zut, a Fleming whose occupation was playing the trombone, smoking long clay pipes and waiting for coffee in front of complicated filter machines. This Zut, apart from possessing the above-mentioned qualities, was also—so I guessed—a distant relation of Maeterlinck's. I deduced this from a number of signs. For instance, whenever we happened to fall silent and there was a break in the conversation, Zut would sigh significantly and then explain his sigh by the words 'someone was present in the room'. In general he could not just be quiet, but only in a specially solemn way. His favourite words were 'someone', 'something' and 'strange'. His conversation went more or

less like this: 'I feel sad . . . someone has passed through the garden', 'something has just happened to some girl, and my eyelids are becoming heavy', 'can you hear how strangely the clock is striking? It is a portent of some kind'. At morning coffee he was full of memories of the dreams he had had; at dinner troubled by vague sensations of other worlds; at supper by the anticipation of strange encounters (which, however, did not stop him from enjoying all his meals). He saw a mystery in everything: the shape of a cloud, a bird which chanced to fly into the room, even a soup-tureen broken by his servant, a clumsy Flemish woman. After spending two hours with him I suspected him not only of being a relative of Maeterlinck's, but also of suffering from some mental illness. I communicated my impressions to the Teacher, but he replied: 'Alas! Zut is perfectly sane, and I don't believe even that he's a relation of Maeterlinck's, or rather, the venerable poet has many thousands of such relations. On the roof of Zut's house there's a lightning conductor, in the front hall there's a barometer; when he falls ill he calls in the best doctor and is unable to utter a single word in his agitation until the doctor has at last replaced the stethoscope in his pocket and pronounced the name of the illness in Latin. He is very fond of repeating the word "Providence", but he's had himself inoculated against smallpox, diphtheria and typhoid fever. Of course if you were to ask him about all this he would not be flustered in the least and would say something to the effect that you mustn't "tempt Providence", and so on. But in him you may observe a man who cannot live without a mystery. You will say that there are many things in the world as yet unprobed by reason. True enough, but in a long row of sealed rooms some of the doors have been broken open and inside you find the most ordinary furnishings of a mediocre home. This cools the fervour of the Zuts of this world; it makes them put the seals back on the doors. The next step is cosmetics, the mending of tattered trousers and all the methods whereby an old strumpet passes herself off as an innocent virgin.'

Returning to the same question of mystery, he introduced me to Wolff, a German theosophist.

In daily life Wolff was an ordinary German and possessed something in the nature of a wife, that is, an anaemic maiden called Mathilde who fulfilled all kinds of duties about the house. But sometimes, having eaten a goodly amount of pork and drunk sufficient beer, having smoked a cigar and knowing not what was to come—i.e. at a time when other mortals read articles about the Cabinet crisis, catch flies and crush them between their fingernails, or simply pick their noses, ears and other things in a variety of ways—Wolff suddenly became very dignified, locked the semblance of a wife in the kitchen, so that she should not disturb him with the clatter of dishes, announced that his spirit was in a higher state, because out of the astral world in which he had lived before (with Mathilde and the pork, that is) he was now going to Buddhi, and that he could now concentrate and see everything. What followed made no sense at all; it turned out that Wolff had previously not been Wolff at all but a lark, an Aztec chieftain and a mistress of Louis XV. Moreover, he not only knew the names of all the towns of Atlantis but even the tramway timetable in its capital. He showed a well-worn Polish penny to his colleagues, asserting that it was one of the pieces of silver received by Judas. A birthmark on his body below the spine was an imprint of the star Cassiopeia, which ruled his destiny. In summer he would go away for a month's holiday, to Dornach where his teacher, Steiner, lived, and there he vaguely potted about with stones, building a shrine. The Teacher spoke to me of him as an enchanting, sly fellow.

‘Wolff knows everything, but he finds it a bore to exercise his reason on mathematical problems or social treatises. Besides, he has been dosed too often with the laxative of the Reformation to be able to return to the mediaeval butcher's sweet mysticism. That is why he prefers to invent an amusing mystery, so as to explode it later in an ingenious way. This is no whit worse than the puzzles in the Sunday papers. It is a perfectly correct and

practical form of sport, and beyond that—don't you see even now the path which leads from Aysha to Wolff?

While travelling in Italy we often visited the churches. Inside them it was generally cosy but dirty, for few people paid any attention of the notices asking them to show respect for the holy place by refraining from spitting. Often, besides the old women mumbling stale gossip to each other and children playing hide-and-seek, we would find cripples, dogs and even chickens in the church. We witnessed many curious ceremonies. At Settignano, Christ was interred by riders in fancy dress, men in masks with tiny slits for the eyes, widows in mourning and girls in wedding dresses. This ritual was performed at night, by the light of erect torches, accompanied by drum rolls and the howling of monks. In Florence a white bull, with an individual in a suit of armour seated astride it facing the tail, was led up to the cathedral. The whole thing ended with a firework in the shape of a bird which flew into the church and lit all the candles. In Rome, in a subterranean church, a monk, bellowing like one possessed, led the congregation from altar to altar, whipped his body with ropes and finally lay down in a coffin. In Naples, by the light of hundreds of bonfires, to the popping of crackers and rockets, we saw some blood begin to boil on the statue of a saint with an obscure name. To be exact, at first the blood for some reason refused to boil and the crowd addressed the saint with special Italian expressions consisting of a combination of extravagant praise and invective. Then the blood did come to the boil, everyone clapped their hands, shouted 'Bravo!' to the saint, and the thing ended with dancing.

Watching all this, the Teacher would say: 'The poor prisoner of the Vatican is dreaming with his head facing backwards, as befits his rank. He dreams of the enemy, Voltaire, and he doesn't so much as suspect the existence of Max Linder. For many centuries religion has conscientiously performed its role of lighting the fuse of human emotions. It nursed the arts for that very purpose, and now it's being killed by competition set up by its own offspring. Instead of the meditations of the

Fathers of the Church we have popular lectures at workers' universities; instead of the decalogue, the unassailable morality of successful shopkeepers. But what is to replace the magnificent passions, the murmurs and the brilliance, the purple robes and the thunder of the organ? Charlie Chaplin's grimaces, Pégoud's loops and the million lights of future carnivals.'

At about this time the Teacher submitted a memorandum to Pope Pius X. It was not published anywhere, but nevertheless aroused the indignation of almost the entire Roman press. The *Osservatore Romano* even hinted that it was the result of intrigues by a certain Great Power. I have no copy of the memorandum in my possession, but I think it essential to reproduce the gist of it. Julio Jurenito could not stand stupid anachronisms, even when they did not directly concern him. He was shocked by the absurdly limited use of electricity in Paris, the busbied soldiers in front of the British king's palace, and myself kissing a lady's hand. On this occasion he proposed to the Pope certain measures for successfully attracting the church's clients. It is quite inadequate, he said, for two professors of a theological academy to write six pages about pragmatism or to decide to instal electric light in a church. You must find out where and under what conditions it is easiest to catch the soul, as carefully and thoroughly as a businessman studies the best place and method for publicity. In former times man's so-called 'religious sense' arose from the tranquil contemplation of nature. It was expressed in a desire for simple harmony, tranquillity, inaction. That is why churches, chapels, shrines were built in solitary, quiet places and were centres of peace. Now peace means half-an-hour's digestion after dinner, idleness and one or two playful thoughts. A little nature several times a year from Saturday lunch-time until Monday morning, a hastily exclaimed 'How beautiful!' a walk, dinner and views on picture postcards. The 'religious sense', however, or rather, that sense of exultation which religion can exploit, is aroused in modern man by the sensation of rapid motion: the train, the motor car, the aeroplane, the races, music, the circus, etc.



Hence it is necessary to instal mobile chapels in express trains and motor cars and to reorganise all church services by making them frenzied instead of slow and decorous, transferring them to arenas, making them consist of dizzy leaps, jumps, cracking whips and soaring aeroplanes. Those were the main thoughts expressed in the memorandum. It remained unanswered.

In quoting the Teacher's opinions on religion I cannot omit a reference to the occasion when he returned a strayed sheep to the fold of the Apostolic Church, namely, Monsieur Tic, the mayor of Guiriec. This mayor was hated by all the *curés* of the neighbourhood, and articles in the Paris paper *La Croix* described the precise punishments he would suffer in hell. Tic had turned one of the town's churches into a hall for dancing, fencing lessons and other 'high-class entertainment', and when obliged to pass the other church, which still served its former purpose, he would always stop and spit on the ground three times. He deleted the word 'God' in all the schoolbooks and replaced it by 'idol', and ordered letters for Saint-Nazaire to be addressed to Nazaire *tout court*. I shall refrain from quoting the long conversation and Monsieur Tic's first platitudinous arguments: how could the whale have swallowed Jonah? How can there be a baby without intervention by a man? And so forth. Thrusting aside these theological problems, Jurenito went straight to the heart of the matter. The foundations of our social existence are laid in heaven. Unaware of what he is doing, Monsieur Tic is dismantling the walls of his own house; he is an anarchist. This was more than the mayor could bear, he crossed the room in agitation, looked out to make sure there was no one in the next room and wound a tricolor ribbon round his waist. Why did the Egyptian slaves build the pyramids? Was it not because at the head of the pyramids there was—Monsieur Tic would forgive the expression—God? (The mayor complained of a headache.) The earthly hierarchy was maintained by the certainty of a hierarchy in heaven. If there is no God, why does Monsieur Tic own a house? Why should the house not be taken over by Loteau, the day-labourer? How very careless

of you, Monsieur Tic! (The mayor started excusing himself: he was busy, a meeting and other things).

A week later the following item appeared in *La Croix*: 'Another Saul. A few days ago the mayor of Guiriec, Monsieur Tic, known for his persecutions of the church, came to see the *curé* of St Antoine's and told him that the Holy Virgin had appeared to him by the Fieux brook and uttered the words "repent ere it is too late". At the beginning of June the first special train will leave for Guiriec taking pilgrims to the Fieux brook. Book your seats at the editorial office'.

We went with the Teacher to see the catacombs on the Appian Way near Rome. After viewing the black, slimy passages, filling our lungs with the putrid stench and admiring an old monk who was selling the suspiciously fresh rib of some saint or other to two Bavarian peasants at a cut price, we came out on the surface. All around there was space and air; few people were to be seen. I plucked up courage and asked the Teacher what he thought of the future of religion. Jurenito said: 'In the end all the bones will rot away, and so will all the gods. The cathedrals will crumble away, the prayers will be forgotten. Do not regret them. Look over there. Do you see a little foal jumping high in the air and kicking out its legs, on the plain? Doesn't he convey to you the whole boundless joy of being? And over there by that hut, there's a dog howling, its muzzle pointing to the sky, its tail dragging on the ground. Isn't all the sorrow of the earth in that howling? The men of the future will be like these. They will not lock up their feelings in vestments weighing thousands of pounds.

'You must look more often at children. What I love in them is not merely the memory of the feather-light days of humanity; in them, too, I see the prototype of the future world. I love the infant that does not yet know anything, that tries with a regal gesture to pull down—what? The brooch on his mother's breast? An apple in the garden? Or a star from the sky? Later they'll teach him how to put on his little shirt, how to kiss his daddy's hand, how to play and how to worship. Today he is

wild, empty and beautiful. If you want to learn to hate men as they should be hated, you must love children, love them dearly. Defile the sanctums, break the commandments, laugh, laugh loudly when laughing is forbidden, and with your laughter, your torment, your fire, clear a place for him who is to come, so that there should be emptiness to receive that which is empty.'

THE DAY AFTER OUR MEETING with Aysha we all went off to spend a few weeks in the Netherlands, where Julio Jurenito had a lot of business to attend to: a meeting of the stockholders of the Island of Java Canal Construction Company, a paper to be read to the Hague Peace Court, the purchase of a large batch of paintings by minor seventeenth-century masters, coffee, and cannibals' knives carved from a charming design by Otto, the German Expressionist. On the way we stopped in Antwerp and in the evening set off to visit the port. A long row of taverns tempted us with their brass bananas, swaying parrots and Negroes with pipes made of pumpkin-rind stuck between their lips. We went into one of these taverns which seemed the quietest (Mr Cool expressed all kinds of fears regarding dollars and the Bible).

On the tables and under them sat people of every conceivable colour: blond Scandinavians, ruddy Flemings, Italians well grilled by the sun, over-grilled Arabs and totally black Somalis. The people under the tables were shouting at the top of their voices, and Mr Cool, clutching his dollars, mentally quoted the Bible, convinced that a fight with knives, and possibly even with Brownings, would begin at any moment. But the Teacher reassured him, explaining that these were Castilians amiably discussing the merits of the tavern-keeper's daughter's legs. A glum Englishman sat alone on top of a cage, spitting out the word 'whisky' every five minutes. Then he brightened up, performed some childish trick for his own benefit involving the mysterious appearance of a coin in a hat and, having demonstrated it, laughed heartily and long. The Frenchmen drank little, made a lot of noise, and boasted continually, one of having knifed twelve bandits within the space of twenty-four hours in Morocco, the other of having afforded the most varied

pleasures to the same number of girls within the space of a single night in his native Nîmes. Whenever the waitress, a very plain woman of about fifty, passed by the sack of pepper near which they were sitting, both of them would grab her by the upper arm shouting 'Ho-ho! My beauty', which apparently formed part of an essential ritual.

Suddenly in a back corner someone began to moan in Russian: 'Friend, brother, tell me, am I a human being or not?' I glanced round and saw a fairly typical Russian intellectual with a little beard so thin that it looked as though it had grown in a bad harvest year, wearing pince-nez with one lens knocked out and a broad-brimmed felt hat, on which various customers of various other taverns had certainly sat and lain many a time.

He was insistently shaking one of the Negroes, who was quite unable to answer so profound a question—all the more as it was put to him in a language he did not know—but, in his excitement and desire to understand, had stuck out the tip of his tongue and was shaking his head in all directions. This spectacle was so picturesque and touching that we all shifted over to the Russian's table. He was overjoyed to see a compatriot and immediately appealed to me to solve the problem left unanswered by the poor Somali. Then he announced with much zest, breaking a jug and four glasses in the process, that 'all this was mere fiction'. This pleased the Teacher, and he performed for the Russian philosopher a few small but curious experiments, or to use more emotional language, 'miracles', confirming the non-existence of real space and time. The Russian was so struck by this that he felt his pockets and the Negro's nose, and then sat for a long time with an expression of profundity on his face and his wrist to his ear, ascertaining that his watch was still ticking. When he had made sure that the Negro had a nose and that his watch was working, but that, nevertheless, neither time nor space existed, and feeling unable to co-ordinate all this, he hiccuped, ordered another litre of vodka, and proudly declared that 'all is fiction, but man exists'.

At the Teacher's affectionate smile he took offence and wanted to leave, but did not do so and considered it necessary to introduce himself as follows: 'A free man, in other words, Alexey Spiridonovich' Tishin'. Immediately afterwards he expressed a strong desire to tell Jurenito the story of his life, and asked whether we could not go with him to the station and sit down in an empty railway carriage. Not even I was able to follow the trend of his thought. Then Tishin explained that he was accustomed to telling the story of his life in railway carriages to people he did not know, and as he was now over thirty he found it difficult to change his habits, yet the story of his life must be told or else he would either thrash the Negro, or drown himself, or proceed at once to erect barricades here, on the spot. Neither of these three possibilities appealed to us, but at the same time we did not feel much like crossing the whole town to get to the railway station. With characteristic tact the Teacher convinced Alexey Spiridonovich that a port tavern was the same thing as a railway carriage, so that by telling the story of his life in such a place he would betray neither the great traditions of Russian literature nor his own thirty-year-old habits.

Alexey Spiridonovich was born in the town of Yelets and spent his childhood there. Soon after little Alyosha's birth his mother ran off with a Frenchman called Georges, the hairdresser of the local marshal of the nobility. In Moscow Georges received from her some 'souvenirs without value', to wit, a casket containing the family diamonds and, regarding his mission in the land of savages completed, he returned to his native Toulouse. Alyosha's mother tried to keep going somehow, wrote letters, looked up relations, but after drifting thus for two years she died. The boy lived with his father, a retired general and a great autocrat. He was tended by a series of governesses who succeeded one another fairly rapidly and were in the habit of devoting their leisure hours to the general. After spending a night in the general's bedroom they would beat Alyosha and pinch him hard, jeering: 'I'd like to see you tell your daddy

about this'. When, however, fate forced them to spend long weeks in the nursery, sensing the onset of disfavour, they would treat Alyosha to cream rolls and whisper in his ear: 'You're a dear little boy, go and tell your daddy I love you very much, and him too. Only mind you don't say I sent you'. The general had bouts of frenzied drinking. Sometimes, snatching a whip hanging on the wall above his Turkish divan, he would lash Alyosha's back with it, saying: 'Whore's spawn, here's for you! The devil only knows who's your father! You dirty barber, you! Go and soap your face!' Then at night he would wake the little boy, who would gaze terrified at the old man crawling on all fours by his little drop-side cot howling: 'My angel, my pure one! My little sunshine! I'm not worthy of you, I'm a reptile, a lecher! Stamp on me! Spit, spit on your father!' He would not quieten down until Alyosha had pretended to spit at him. Sometimes after this the general would humbly crawl away, like a dog to his kennel, but at other times he would suddenly leap to his feet, growl: 'What? You dare to spit at your father, filth?', snatch up the whip, and the whole business would start all over again.

Alexey Spiridonovich remembered one night especially. Some time earlier, the general had brought home a young bear-cub, which became Alyosha's bosom friend and shared all his games. The bear-cub was called 'Bumba'; he was clumsy, passionately fond of sweets and very affectionate.

One night the general wakes Alyosha, wraps him carefully in a blanket and carries him down to the garden. There, tied to a summer house, stands Bumba on his rear legs. The general brandishes his revolver and roars with laughter: 'The murder of Saint Sebastian; A picture worthy of the brush of Aivazovsky, ha ha ha! Mishka, run and fetch a bottle of vodka, I'll drink it to the passing of the Lord's servant, Bumba!' The bear-cub, thinking it is all a game, licks his chops and growls. The general fires, but in his drunken state merely puts a bullet through the bear-cub's paw. Bumba squeals desperately, like a puppy when you've trodden on his tail. At last it's over. Alyosha is

carried upstairs, unconscious. A fever, delirium. But he got over it after a while.

Alexey Spiridonovich also told us something about his childish games. The one he liked best of all was catching flies on the window-pane and tearing off their legs and wings. Afterwards he would feel sorry and bored. Then he would make a 'Flies' Hospital', with wingless flies in one matchbox, legless ones in another, and so on. Sometimes he would pray before an ikon of the Virgin to find a place in paradise for himself, Bumba and Mummy (about whom he heard from the old housekeeper), but then, furious because he alone had no Mummy—Petya had one, Vasya had one, only he hadn't—and because Bumba had been shot dead by Daddy, he would take a large pin out of the current governess's hat and start jabbing the Virgin's eyes: 'Here, take that!'

When Alyosha was in the fifth form at school, the general died, repentant and shriven, of an excess of vodka and a cold caught during a pilgrimage to Tihon Zadonsky, on which he had been accompanied by a whore called Lyubka and by Fräulein Charlotte, leaving his son a certain sum of money and a set of not quite honest guardians. Soon after this Alyosha first came to know the temptations of the flesh. Until then, after reading Tolstoy's *Resurrection* secretly in serial form in a magazine, he had merely tried in vain to transform Lena, the maid, into Katyusha, ambushing her in the passage between dining-room and kitchen, furtively fingering her body and causing her to break an inordinate amount of china. After many misgivings, hesitations and fears, Alyosha went off with Puklov, the dunce of the class, who already sported a moustache, to Angelica Karpovna's establishment and there received a certain elementary education from the stout but agile Styosha. When Alyosha came out of Styosha's closet into Angelica Karpovna's drawing-room, Puklov asked with enthusiasm, drinking his muddy beer: 'Well, what did you think of it? A bit of all right, eh? It's my discovery, I'm a kind of Columbus, you know'. But Alyosha covered his face with his hands and whis-



pered: 'What have I done?' And after being called a milksop he ran out into the street. The next day, fully intending to start a new and honourable existence he went to the library, took out a subscription and chose some books by Merezhkovsky and Berdayev.

None of which, of course, stopped him from making another visit soon afterwards, though not to Styosha but to Marunya, a swarthy and sweaty Moldavian who looked like an olive oozing juice. Neither did he stop reading books about sin and the Antichrist. He started keeping a notebook divided into sections such as 'Love', 'God', 'Nature' and so on, and entered the thoughts which particularly struck him under the appropriate headings. Thus in the section called 'Man' he put: 'Man is made for happiness as birds are made for flight' by V. Korolenko; 'Man—how proudly the word rings!' by M. Gorky, and so on.

Then he fell in love with blue-eyed Nyura, the daughter of a post-office clerk, whose distinctive features were four curls in the shape of sausages, a locket with a picture of a kitten, and a passionate love of chocolates with pistachio centres. Having fallen in love he went about sighing and, finally, by dint of speaking at length of his loneliness and edging closer to Nyura on the narrow sofa, he achieved a long and substantial kiss. After this he fell a prey to doubts. Though love might appear lofty and inspiring in the works of all the best authors, though Nyura's plump lips might be sweet, there was much about the situation to make him pause. Nyura was no Styosha and no Marunya; she had a father and all the rest of it, and this meant marriage. But neither was Nyura a Beatrice: she did not thirst for divine and sacred rebellion. And *that* meant a job, nappies and so forth. The worst were the children. How could a man read Nietzsche or Schopenhauer when there was an infant crying next to his desk? Of course, children didn't always come; he had even heard the other chaps mention something. But that 'something' wasn't precisely an engagement ring that you could present to your bride. Besides, what a defilement of an ideal!

He opened his notebook at the heading 'Love' and read: 'Only the morning of love is beautiful', S. Nadson. This provided the final impulse towards a definite decision and he sent Nyura a letter covering sixteen pages, all about the 'great conflict between the mind and the heart' and the 'incalculable ways of Providence'. Six months later he heard that Nyura was engaged to a lawyer's clerk, and exclaimed indignantly: 'There's eternal love for you! The ideal! But I've never been vindictive and I hope she'll be happy'.

At the age of about twenty Alexey Spiridonovich took up politics, i.e. he started taking notes of Bogdanov's textbook of political economy and meditating whether it was or was not a sin to assassinate a provincial governor. One day Puklov, his childhood friend, who had become a member of a mysterious underground organisation, brought a big red-haired fellow in a fancy Russian shirt to see Alexey Spiridonovich and whispered in a deep voice: 'He's being watched; all the usual places have fallen through, you'll have to put him up for the night'. Alexey Spiridonovich consented and spent the entire evening trying to elicit his guest's opinions on revolutions, violence and redemption. The fellow, however, turned out to be of the taciturn kind and reacted favourably only to tongue sandwiches and an album containing views of the Italian Riviera. All during the next days Alexey Spiridonovich was beset by doubts. 'Perhaps he has killed or will kill. I gave him shelter, I saved him. That means I'm an accessory to murder. I'm a murderer. Of course it says "not peace but the sword", but in that case how to interpret "he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword"?' In short, Alexey Spiridonovich was profoundly shaken and weighed down by what had happened. To crown it all, when he went to the library he was followed all the way by some suspicious individual. Clearly he was being watched. His former spiritual torments were replaced by mental ones. He saw himself in prison, his head shaved, in shackles, sometimes even on the way to the scaffold. This improved his moral condition by making him feel a hero, but made it impossible

to live in peace. After a week of agony he decided to escape abroad, but, not knowing how to set about this, he finally applied to the governor of Orel for a passport. For three days he expected to be arrested and was infinitely surprised when a passport for foreign travel was issued to him. 'I've tricked them! I'm too clever for them!' he thought in the sleeping-car to Berlin.

Living abroad this conviction was still further confirmed and Alexey Spiridonovich sincerely regarded himself as a political exile. He ordered fashionable suits from Paris tailors, stopped at first-class hotels, bought hundreds of shop-window objects which caught his fancy—a special set of ointments and brushes for cleaning cigarette-holders, electric moustache-curlers and the like—yet enjoyed parading his veneration for 'homespun Russia' and contrasting her 'humble nakedness' with the well-fed insensibility of Europe. He did nothing at all, and when asked to state his profession on hotel registration forms proudly wrote 'intellectual', to the discomfiture of the hotel porters. Sometimes he would fall into dejection and decide he must work 'for the future of Russia'. On one of these occasions he enrolled in the Versailles school of horticulture, believing that coarse materialism was foreign to the Slav and the motherland must have flowers. But after hearing the first lecture on fertilisers he slipped off to Paris and drank himself into a coma. Another time he felt an urge to join an organisation and hesitated for a long time between the 'Friends of the Socialist Revolutionary Party' and the 'Society for the Improvement of the Russian Church Choir', for in his view the socialisation of the land and the revival of religion were equally important. He would converse with a certain surly Social Revolutionary—whose favourite occupations were playing draughts and rolling cigarettes—on all sorts of abstract subjects, and on leaving him would go to a café with a back-garden—where a pock-marked middle-aged chorister was wont to beat the Frenchmen at bowls—and pester him with the same questions. In the end he joined both organisations and paid his membership fees, but did

not attend a single meeting, for the hot summer weather arrived and he preferred to drape a wet sheet across the window and sit in his pants drinking Vyssotsky's genuine Russian tea.

Europe failed to corrupt Alexey Spiridonovich and he went on being mortally afraid of sin. Meeting a jolly Frenchwoman nicknamed Youyou in a tavern he followed her to her flat and was about to perform all that is customary on such occasions when he noticed that she showed not the least interest in him. He thereupon changed his mind and began putting on his clothes. To her bewildered questions he replied delicately that he was prepared to accept earthly joys without spiritual communion—such things had been known in Hellas—but not without mutual passion; and left, followed by a torrent of invective and some object unsuitable for throwing which happened to be within Youyou's reach.

Meanwhile the years went by, his money dwindled, assisted not a little by past guardians and present lawyers. The remittances from home grew thinner and thinner. Alexey Spiridonovich moved to an attic and instead of the Café de Monico took to visiting various pubs round the markets and stations. Still, as in the past, whenever he had half a bottle of drink inside him he would start smashing glasses, massaging his forehead tragically and hurling bitter truths at anyone who happened to be near, such as 'all is fiction, but Man exists!' 'What is the world? Nothing, but Man is spirit,' etc.

Once, for lack of anything better to do, he decided to tour the old churches of Belgium, and happened to drop in at the tavern in Antwerp where we found him in the state described above; and such, more or less, was his biography, which he related to us—though obviously not for the first time, yet with pathos, tears, and profound emotion. Ending his tale he cried: 'I may be a brute, a slinking reptile, but Man exists'. The Teacher objected mildly: 'My friend, your interesting and instructive story proves more convincingly than ever that what you dream of is just as illusory as everything else in the world'. Tishin was shocked, and as we had already noticed that

all strong emotional experiences were in his case linked with the smashing of tableware, we hurriedly led him out of the tavern.

Alexey Spiridonovich announced that he would sail at once on the steamer *Regina*, just loading in the port, to Rio de Janeiro in order to look for Man. The Teacher said that, if Man existed, his presence must extend over both hemispheres and there was no need to go to Brazil. He, Jurenito, and Mr Cool would be glad to furnish Mr Tishin with the means necessary for his search. They would found a Society for the Search for Man. But if this work led to nothing and Man turned out to be non-existent, Alexey Spiridonovich would have to admit that Jurenito was right and thenceforth follow him.

‘I shall be very glad to have a native Russian with me. Whenever I speak to a Slav I enjoy the splendid sensation not of firm land, but of a bog which gives way under your feet. Oh, of course you, too, have your poets, your stock exchange, and—so I believe—even a parliament. But all the things that are so solid and substantial in the West, in Russia need, not a hurricane, but the merest breath, a fortuitous sigh, to vanish without trace. I’m not naïve, I know that you—like women—prefer yielding to taking, I know you’re weak, indecisive and inclined towards everything except action, I know it’s not for you to destroy these snug cities held together by the blood of many hundreds of generations. But you are vast, and the aged world will not be able to bear so huge a desert. It will turn dizzy and swoon. You will overthrow no one, but you will drag many after you in your fall. For this I love you and I believe that you, Mr Tishin, will be with me.’ Alexey Spiridonovich agreed and solemnly shook Jurenito’s hand. This took place at dawn in the empty port, among emigrants dozing on their bundles—Jews from Galicia and\* indeterminate tramps in cloth caps quarrelling among themselves over a large yellow neckerchief. The scene was somewhat operatic and Jurenito, grinning, began to sing ‘Daisy, my poppet, where are you?’, at which Alexey Spiridonovich for some reason took offence.

I will not describe in detail the activities of the Society for the Search for Man, in view of their excessively complex and varied nature. Besides, the transactions of the academic section of the society have been collected by the Danish psychologist Fals and are shortly to appear in print. As was to be expected, they yielded results that were extremely unfavourable to Alexey Spiridonovich by proving the non-existence of the special systems outlined by him and revealing that the specimens examined coincided entirely with the degenerative species already known to zoo-psychologists. As for the Society's practical activities, i.e. the direct search for Man, according to Alexey Spiridonovich's plan, these yielded nothing but a series of more or less amusing anecdotes. At the start the agents of the Society, attracted by the enormous prizes offered, searched everywhere armed with questionnaires drawn up by Alexey Spiridonovich and consisting of thirty-eight questions, in the hope of finding someone able to satisfy the desiderata. They came back to the Society's headquarters in the Rue de la Boétie with the most unexpected candidates for the title of Man: old ladies from homes for the aged, goitrous idiots from the Alps, doctors of philosophy from Heidelberg and young members of the Jewish *Bund*. But soon, disappointed to find Alexey Spiridonovich so hard to please, they transferred their loyalties to Mr Cool's section and turned to selling his inimitable automatic slot-machines.

In any case the 'search for Man' became fashionable, and some readers of this book may remember a competition announced by the Paris newspaper *Matin* following immediately after a dancing tournament and a contest for the wittiest definition of betrayed love. The newspaper published the photograph of a young woman in rags with a baby in her arms. Caption: 'This woman claims she has had nothing to eat for three days and has nowhere to sleep. What should a real "Man" do if he saw her?' The replies received were very varied and covered a multitude of aspects: 'turn his attention to the moral education of young girls', 'clear our streets of vagrants', 'see she gets a medical certificate', 'establish how much longer she can live

under such conditions', 'overthrow the Cabinet', 'convey her sufferings to the world in verse, or, if unable to do that, in prose'. The prize went to the reply which occurred most frequently (13,426): 'Say to her: you should be ashamed of yourself. You are a young woman and should work'. As a curiosity the newspaper published a suggestion expressed by only one reader: 'Take her to a soup kitchen and give her a good meal at State expense'.

Losing his confidence in the Society's work Tishin tried to conduct the search on his own, but was thrice robbed of his money and clothes, beaten up by some enraged concierge and finally taken to prison, whence the Teacher had to extricate him.

After this Jurenito ventured to ask the obstinate creature whether he admitted defeat. 'No, no!' Alexey Spiridonovich cried. 'Try to understand me!' (Here it should be mentioned that he was very familiar and the very next day after meeting the Teacher insisted on drinking *Brüderschaft* with him and slobbering all over his cheeks, after which Jurenito, wincing, went straight to the wash-basin.) 'Perhaps I haven't found real Man, but he exists! Here's proof: I'm a Man! You don't believe me? Very well, I'm a brute! I'm base, low and filthy! But I love Natasha and I'm a Man, a god! Do you hear me?' Then he told us, eloquently and at length, of his love for Natasha Orlova, a Russian student now in Paris to learn French. In the evenings she would play Tchaikovsky's *Song without Words* to him and Alexey Spiridonovich would feel he was a 'Man'. 'All that's very charming, including Tchaikovsky,' the Teacher remarked, 'but what, precisely, is the difference between your feelings (perfectly legitimate ones, I may add) and certain emotions of my tomcat Joe? The fact, perhaps, that Joe doesn't hire a piano for the occasion but contents himself with his natural musical gifts?' Alexey Spiridonovich fell into a rage, shouting that 'his love was a Man's love', for it 'asked for nothing', and it was 'forever'. 'Very well, we shall see,' said the Teacher, 'let's put off our argument for a few months.'

Jurenito's prediction was soon to be fulfilled, alas, under

rather tragic circumstances. In May, i.e. five weeks after the conversation I have just related, Natasha Orlova died. Faithful to his chaotic and impassioned nature, Alexey Spiridonovich once dared, when in his cups, to accuse the Teacher of the death of his beloved. This was obvious nonsense, for Natasha passed away after an unsuccessful operation for appendicitis performed by one of the best surgeons in France. The Teacher replied with the utmost gentleness that, playing for large stakes, he had no need of winning every trick; indeed, to prove himself right, he would rather have made Mademoiselle Orlova live to be a hundred, since her death could only slow down the inevitable. Certainly Alexey Spiridonovich was inconsolable at first. One rainy night he managed to get past the cemetery gatekeeper and went crawling to Natasha's grave, where he remained lying with his face to the ground until he was noticed and removed. Little by little he began to return to life, continuing to speak incessantly of his beloved, of her love for Parma violets, of her tiny hands (glove size five and a half), and of his love for her. Once he said: 'I think it's best for her that she is dead; she did not know the whole melancholy of life'. The Teacher whispered in my ear: 'That's the beginning: he's trying to find comfort'. Then Alexey Spiridonovich resumed his normal interests and started reading the newspapers and playing chess. Remembering Natasha he would suddenly fall silent and, as it were, withdraw into himself; but this happened more and more rarely. Once, when Aysha brought him a little bunch of violets saying: 'Your lady used to like these', he grew angry, and Jurenito said: 'Stage two: he's trying to forget'. Following this, for a fairly long time, Alexey Spiridonovich did not mention Natasha at all; during this time he was cheerful, calm and even-tempered. After this interlude, when at last he did recall her again in the course of a conversation with me, he spoke about her without any agitation whatever, 'epically' I should say, the way one might speak of childhood memories, one's grandmother or an old clothes cupboard, that is, with sympathy and goodwill. This was in October, and in November he met



Mademoiselle Vile, a French woman painter, who was eccentric and extremely charming. Everything started all over again: sighs, edging closer on a sofa, loneliness, but this time without an inconvenient father or appendicitis. He came to us and said that fate had a higher wisdom of its own. Natasha had been too quiet and pensive, she would not have been happy with him, she was better off now and so was Mademoiselle Vile, and so, in truth, was he. . . . Meeting the Teacher's sarcastic glance he became embarrassed, as though remembering everything all at once, and began shouting that Jurenito was right, that he Alexey Spiridonovich, was 'not a Man but a brute', but that 'life was beautiful for all that'.

A month later Mademoiselle Vile, who had evidently grown tired of Tishin's lyrical sighs and his philosophy of infinity, replaced him by an Argentinian jockey. Then Alexey Spiridonovich came slinking to the Teacher with lamentations about 'life being a fiction', and thereafter followed him everywhere. Being a disorganised and disordered person he never fully grasped Jurenito's aim and often strayed from the path, carried away by various 'fictions', as he called them, but he loved the Teacher as best he could. Such was Jurenito's fourth disciple.

The Teacher's reflections  
on love

IN THIS CHAPTER I shall reproduce some of the Teacher's reflections on earthly love and describe some incidents which demonstrate his attitude to this question. Evil tongues used to say that Jurenito was a debauchee, that he corrupted young girls and carried with him, in a specially constructed cabin trunk, a monstrous half-woman found by him on a mountain top in the Andes, for the satisfaction of his inhuman lust. All these are vicious lies. I am telling here all there is to tell about the Teacher's life, chapter by chapter, keeping back nothing of the magnificent heritage, out of a genuine desire to help mankind. The Teacher always spoke of carnal love and passion with calm, purity and ease, without embarrassment, giggling, pauses or girlish slobbering. He would look with equal attention at a highschool girl, her breasts just beginning to swell under her uniform dress, who would shyly ask him for his autograph, and at the grandiose spectacle of the mating of mad red-eyed bulls.

Once as he passed by a steer which, in rage and torment, was covering a heifer, the Teacher took off his hat. In reply to Mr Cool's bewildered questioning he said: 'I am merely repeating your boring and conventional gesture. Take off your bowler too, Mr Cool. If we are to bare our heads at all (which is hygienically advisable, apart from anything else), we should not do it before faded beauties with gold crowns on their heads, not before a corpse already beginning to smell, for all that it is heaped high with belated flowers and ribbons; no, it is here that we should do it, before this gesture of the ploughman turning up the hard soil, this seed ejected in torment, out of poverty: before sweat, blood, life'.

Mr Cool certainly regarded the Teacher as a thoroughly immoral and depraved character, which, however, did not pre-

vent Jurenito from being an excellent guide in his opinion. But from time to time the American would fancy himself as a saviour of souls, and begin to weary the Teacher with all kinds of dubious admonitions.

I remember how one morning, meeting our missionary in the garden, Jurenito said to him: 'Mr Cool, last night I found a low and dirty pamphlet on my bedside table. I like to keep my room very clean, I always sleep with my window open because I'm fond of fresh air, and I cannot allow such things to occur. Be so kind as to transfer your activities outside the confines of my bedroom'.

'You're joking! The little book I left for you to glance at, a work of great talent and high moral value, is by our young preacher Mr Hell, called "On married life according to the teachings of St Paul".'

'Yes, that's just the scabrous literature I was speaking about. Once there was the stamen and the pistil, the buck and the roe, the youth and the girl. Then came your apostles and prophets, your Fathers of the Church and castrated monks, declared the great to be shameful and the admirable to be scarcely tolerable, propagated their punishments and their filthy hole-and-corner whispers, their slobbering worship of purity, that is, of anaemic impotence and degenerate perversion. Instead of primeval man who exuberantly tumbles a joyful woman on the grass in spring, they have set up somewhere out of sight—next door to the lavatory—a bed on which man is permitted, out of consideration for his human, i.e. base weakness to sleep with his lawful wife by courtesy of the immaculate church. "Of course it's best if you don't marry," your favourite apostle said. Have you thought about that? It's best if you don't give birth. They've established a cult of the mother, surrounded her breast with angelic light, installed her in the temple, but they've piled the way to that same temple high with filth, stained it with the slimy spittle of squeamish monks. Of course they couldn't castrate the whole of mankind—the ammunition wouldn't go round—and so they decided to be "tolerant". Well, don't be

surprised if, after that, the world has become one enormous *maison de tolérance*. You have said "this is of the flesh, therefore it is evil", and millions have believed you. Some have put on the ascetic's hairshirt and turned to sterile occupations, that is, all they think of day and night is how to keep the stopper in the bottle of fizzy water. But the heated liquid keeps pushing the stopper out of the bottle's neck. Where, in what den of vice, do they think so much of lust as in the ascetic's cell or in the old maid's closet? They think of lust without knowing it, they think with their bodies, their unhealthy sweat, their dreams of the Eternal Virgin or the Heavenly Bridegroom. Others—the majority—decided "well, if we're vile, we may as well go the whole hog". What could have been a temple has become a refuse heap. Instead of the marvellous myth, you have cigarette cases with double lids: on the first a landscape or a bunch of forget-me-nots, but on the second, the secret one, the one that's for the lads, there's something very nasty indeed. This cigarette case—or rather, forgive me, Mr Cool, your spiritual brochure—I was obliged to throw out of my room in the interests of cleanliness and hygiene.'

The Teacher loathed our institution of marriage, placing even contemporary prostitution far above it. On this subject he was destined to clash with the ignorance and hostility of society. For instance, once a Vicomte Lenido—a friend of Jurenito's—came to see us in a state of considerable excitement and swinging his cane. The history of this youthful scion of a noble family was as follows: having lost the last crumbs of his inheritance at the gaming tables of Biarritz, having contracted all conceivable and inconceivable debts, he met a Miss Hopes, an elderly American lady thirsting for love, tender vows and a coat of arms on her visiting card. The rest is obvious; all I need add is that Miss Hopes was quite exceptionally plain—so that her face seemed like something very far from a face, obscenely bared—but also very passionate, shamelessly insisting that her fiancé should keep putting his arm round her waist or touching her breast when on the public beach. Receiving an invitation to the wedding

the Teacher was sorely grieved and worried by the future of the couple. He did not attend the wedding, but sent as a present a large and handsome Mexican scarf and an excerpt from the *Farmers' Calendar* dealing with methods of cross-breeding a stallion with a she-ass. In such cases it is customary first to show a mare to the stallion and then put a tight bandage over its eyes. In enclosing the scarf, Jurenito suggested the use of this method for mutual marital happiness. As I have already said, the vicomte appeared the day after the wedding, swinging his quite unequivocal cane. But the Teacher was the first to admit his error. 'How inexcusable of me! I sent you everything except—the mare. I thought you had such a wide circle of acquaintances. I quite understand your anger, please forgive me. Have you met Mademoiselle Tonette?' The vicomte dropped his cane, burst out laughing and went away with a few addresses in his notebook.

On another occasion, the café where we were sitting was visited by a Monsieur Bock, a hack journalist forever on the hunt for sensational news that would fill twenty lines, and forced to content himself with three-line items about local thefts slipped to him by a clerk at the Préfecture in exchange for the unlimited right to visit Madame Bock. The journalist began to pester Jurenito for some kind of sensation, even a small one: say a revolution in Mexico or a new invention by Mr Cool. At first the Teacher refused, but then, being a man of great kindness, he dictated the following story to Monsieur Bock, a story destined to enjoy unrivalled success: '*Appalling crime*. Last night in a populous part of Paris, in the rue Saint-Honoré, Monsieur Tric, a well known barrister, vice-chairman of the League against Immorality in the Streets, committed an indecent assault on young Lucie Z., aged 16. The worst feature of the crime is that it was committed with the full knowledge of the girl's parents, owners of a large soap factory, who were in the flat at the time'. Monsieur Bock ran off in a state of unbounded enthusiasm. The story was published, and a few days later the journalist came to see Jurenito with his head swathed in bandages.

'You've let me down,' he complained. 'It was all a lie. That scoundrel Tric just married the girl, and they're living with her parents in the rue Saint-Honoré. I've been thrashed three times already and shall be again. I don't go home to sleep and daren't call at the office. To crown it all I've received a summons from the court. You've made me the unhappiest man on earth.'

'My friend, I'm deeply sorry to hear of your troubles, but I haven't signed against the truth. Lucie, at sixteen, was not in a position to give her consent to what was done to her, for she had had a pure and moral upbringing. She didn't even know why people kiss. She had seen her fiancé precisely twice and was thoroughly frightened of him. Of course her parents knew about the crime. . .'

Bock moaned: 'But can't you understand, they were married!'  
'It was only to stop you from getting into still worse trouble that I omitted to mention that representatives of the State, that is, officials of the *mairie* who prepared the wedding contract, were also accessories to the crime.'

These arguments failed to convince poor Bock, and he went away dejected, taking with him the entire contents of Jurenito's purse offered to him in a friendly way. The Teacher was delighted to hear a week later that Monsieur Trac, a rival and sworn enemy of Monsieur Tric, had found the poor journalist and offered him money and compensation for his injuries.

The Teacher used to say: 'When two persons start a business together they are interested in each other's capital and business ability, not love of poetry or skill at football. When a man wants to plant a tree in his garden he does not waste his time wondering whether the soil is a sacred substance or mere dust, does not admire it as a landscape, and does not have it valued by a real estate agent, but finds out whether it is suitable for that particular tree. When it's a matter of buying a shirt collar, no one—however handsome the colour or low the price—will buy one that is too large or too small. But when people are paired in matrimony, everything under the sun is investigated except the thing which, in substance, is the reason why they are

brought together. They find out the size of the bride's dowry and how many silver spoons she's got, the bridegroom's present salary and prospects of a rise, whether or not he likes to play bridge, whether she knows how to make a liver pâté, whether they have kind hearts and good lungs, know foreign languages—and so on. Having ascertained all these things they lead the newly-married couple—not into an office, a philanthropic institution or a school of philology, but towards a broad and comfortable bed, eyes chastely cast down, and then everybody's very much surprised at the statistics of unhappy marriages. O you hypocrites, fathers, husbands, universal marriage-mongers, you who drag earthly joy through the dog-eared files of notaries, you brokers of bonded wares, and you who mumble your fine words while the bargain's clinched, you priests and pastors, parsons and rabbis! What brothel would not blush with shame were you to enter it?

At Sèvres, the Teacher introduced us to Monsieur and Madame Nolvo. Both were entomologists, which means their favourite occupation was watching caterpillars. Apart from that they were young, not bad-looking, and quite pleasant-natured, lived in a comfortable flat where fine porcelain figures and flower vases stood among the jars of worms; generally speaking they possessed all the features of a happy couple. We were living in the neighbourhood at the time and often met the Nolvos; from the peculiar bitterness of words dropped here and there, from certain almost imperceptible gestures, we gathered that all was not well in that delightful household. And indeed, Monsieur Nolvo soon made an admission to the Teacher. It turned out that the couple were devoted to each other and felt true intimacy and mutual understanding as they sat for days on end over their bisected worms, or, in the evenings, read aloud to each other the moving elegies of the Comtesse de Noailles. 'Our souls were made for each other,' said Nolvo, 'but—!' And then he made an oblique reference to that which contemporary moralists and hypocrites do not permit to be mentioned except in the psychiatrist's consulting-room or before

a court of law: the fatal disharmony of their bodies. It killed every trace of joy, it transformed passion into ghastly forced labour to which the two victims had been condemned, no one knew why. Having heard these complaints the Teacher introduced the unhappy scientist to Mademoiselle Vile, who by then had completely worn out her Argentinian, and advised us all to see more of Madame Nolvo. The couple's sufferings had evidently been prolonged and excessive, for matters developed at a rapid pace.

A fortnight later, returning from Paris after a rendezvous with Vile, Nolvo could no longer hide a smile of utter contentment. Madame Nolvo, strange to relate, made Aysha her choice and, judging by the reports of our simple-hearted brother, she had no cause to regret it. One might have thought that perfect happiness would follow. But the couple, instead of continuing to study caterpillars and read poetry in the hours unoccupied by Mademoiselle Vile and Aysha, abandoned themselves to reflections on spiritual and non-spiritual love. Then Monsieur Nolvo decided to take along his collection of particularly interesting maggots found in various kinds of cheese, and insisted that Mademoiselle Vile should share all his transports concerning the alimentary tracts of these creatures, whereupon he was banished by his mistress, resolutely and forever. Madame Nolvo, in turn, took to reading to Aysha sonnets about the love of Greek nymphs, and when he, lulled by her voice, fell asleep she began to sob loudly: 'You don't understand the beauty of spiritual love'. All this happened more or less before our eyes, for neither Nolvo nor Aysha was distinguished by his reticence.

'Here's another example of Eros in his death throes,' the Teacher told us. 'Nolvo insists on kisses and spiritual communion and produces the worms from his pocket. He was brought up to look upon his flesh as something inferior, not the drawing-room but, say, the hall. And so he will betray his body, his joy, his love, he will return to Madame Nolvo and will caress her without passion, will or pleasure, only because, after sleeping with her through the night, in the morning he will find spiritual



communion, two microscopes and a slim volume bound in brocade.'

Another time we caused a disturbance of conjugal bliss in Milan, where we often visited a parliamentary deputy called Strecotini. This was a scruffy, puny individual who believed himself to be a mad revolutionary, a misunderstood pioneer and blazer of trails, in short something like a Brand who happened to have become a Marxist. He would pull off his collar, bang his fist on a graceful little Empire table and, sweating so profusely that he hadn't time to mop up the moisture, inveigh against the 'proprietary instincts' and the 'petty prejudices' of the modern bourgeois. His wife, an Italian woman of abundant flesh, listened to these speeches with a barely noticeable smile of sarcasm, as if to say that she could supply an amusing commentary if she wished. As she listened she glanced more and more frequently and tenderly at Alexey Spiridonovich, who was at the time going through one of his disillusioned phases. Comrade Strecotini intercepted an infinitely promising glance. He broke off his harangue against 'accursed property' at the most dramatic moment, sent his wife out on a pretext, and settled down demonstratively to wait for us to go.

In the evening Alexey Spiridonovich received the following letter:

'Citizen Tishin, I considered you an honourable man and a Russian Socialist. I allowed you to enter my home. You have broken all the sacred traditions by molesting my wife. Being an enemy of bourgeois prejudices I will not challenge you to a duel, but you will oblige me by never showing your face in my house again. With Socialist greetings, Strecotini.'

This letter revealed to Alexey Spiridonovich the nature of the lady's feelings, so that when, next morning, he saw an announcement in *Avanti* reading: 'My angel! Ignore the tyrant. I am yours. Come to the gallery at three o'clock', (the speed of publication and economy of wording bore witness to Signora Strecotini's considerable practical experience), he understood who was meant, discarded his pessimism and went off to shave.

The Teacher was much amused by this small incident. 'Alexey Spiridonovich, what have you done? You have forgotten that the enemy of property owns not only a pretty little flat with graceful furniture but also a wife. For a wife or a husband is like an object; yours, mine, somebody else's. An attack on them is theft punishable by law. You take a husband much as you would a good wooden cupboard, one that has been used, but once you've got it no one may go near it again, and you hide the key in your pocket. But a wife's more like a bed; she's got to be new, a first-hand article, and serve only her owner. You've spurned this law, you bandit! You aren't a citizen but a criminal, violator of the sacred traditions of the world's greatest revolutionary.'

☛ One Sunday the Teacher took us into Hyde Park in London. 'Look at those who can but may not.' The grass was dotted with young couples. They were betrothed but obliged to wait many years for the wedding, until the young man could 'stand on his own feet', that is, until he had become more or less old. Indoors, they could meet only in the presence of others; apart from that they met in the park on their days off, where they endeavoured, patently impossible though this was, to assuage their accumulated passion. There were dark rings under their eyes, and the eyes themselves were clouded with desire. Like criminals they writhed on the grass, spending hours of torment in half-embraces, touching each other, burning themselves up with furtive kisses. Five or even ten years would pass; they would be worn out, corrupted by so much frustrated ingenuity, sick with involuntary vices. Then their parents, who themselves had lost their youth and joy on the trampled grass, would graciously announce 'now you may get on with it'.

Jurenito reminded us of those couples on another occasion when we visited a vile establishment in the rue Pigalle in Paris. 'Here you will see those who may but cannot.' The hall was filled with good bourgeois seated in front of their beer-mugs in a peaceful, orderly and somnolent manner. I remember the face of one of them: he had a red ribbon in his lapel. Then

a naked man and woman came out into a space railed off from the main part of the hall and laboriously performed, for a fee of ten francs each, all the things that poor savages used to think sacred in the distant past. Gradually, roused by the titillating spectacle, the good bourgeois livened up; some began to giggle, others dribbled their indignation: 'That man's a bull!' Those who were most impressed tried to break through the barrier wisely provided by the management. Thinking that the time was ripe and that the clients, after such a fillip, were in a fit state to enjoy the basic pleasures of existence, young ladies came running from another room and distributed themselves among the guests. The gentleman with the ribbon in his lapel remained indifferent longer than anyone and finally asked for the girl who had taken part in the performance.

At the beginning of 1914 a book was published in London called the *Encyclopædia of Mechanical Love*, something like a modern Kama-Sutra. Owing to a mistake at the printers, the book somehow got into the book depot of an evangelical society, which, taking advantage of the confusion of the first weeks of the war, destroyed the entire edition. Only six copies survived, one of which, as far as I know, can be found in the *Enfer* of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. This book was written by the eleven oldest prostitutes of Paris. We all know that in Paris the women in this trade have little value in their youth and remain in the cheap cafés of the left bank with the status of apprentices. Only when they reach the age of 35 and have lost their youth and beauty—all their natural gifts—but have acquired the skills of an artist do they become fashionable, high-priced and powerful. The authors of the *Encyclopædia* were women of such experience, and Jurenito willingly agreed to contribute a preface. Here is how it ended: 'You have turned life into an art, a difficult science, a complex machine, a splendid organisation, anything you like except life. Do not be surprised, then, if you meet the same phenomenon in love: naïve simplicity replaced by great art, pitiable homespun kisses by a tremendous range of clockwork caresses. You come to visit your mistress with 17

minutes to spare; you are obliged almost to watch the second-hand if you are to be on time. A car awaits you at your front door. You've just come from the stock exchange, where you have sold shares of cotton plantations in Bukhara to a Melbourne banker by radio; you are on your way to the airport to watch an international aeronautical contest. Do not expect a Shulamite: no, you will find a magnificent machine, the last word in modern technique, which will offer you in the space of seventeen minutes a choice of any of the 13,806 pleasures discovered to date, yielding nothing in perfection to your wireless, your brand-new Ford and your portable electric bath'.

Julio Jurenito told us that he had once organised in Mexico a Circle of Prostitutes in Aid of Society Ladies. The tarts, noticing the jealousy with which 'respectable' women gazed at them in the cafés and wishing to make a worthy return for all the philanthropic enterprises of society ladies, addressed them (with Jurenito's help) in the words of the following manifesto: 'Dear comrades! Our jobs are very similar; they are equally hard and call for solidarity. We suffer from too much variety, you have been sold in perpetuity to husbands who may, in many cases, be repulsive to you. Your work is no less onerous than ours. We have therefore decided to come to your aid. Those of you who enjoy your husbands' caresses should make an appropriate application to our section "For the Protection of Marriage". We shall limit your husbands' right to visit our establishments to once a month and will, moreover, oblige them to undertake, formally and in writing, to spend not less than 36 evenings a year with their wives. But there are others among you who long in vain for the joys of the flesh. We may find one, two, or three among the thousands—a café pianist, a pimp, a chance guest—but you are doomed to the torments of a prison. We shall institute for you special clandestine "Tuesdays", which we undertake to keep secret, and at which you may meet the most gifted of our clients'. Jurenito said that the Circle enjoyed considerable success but was discovered by the Watch Committee after six months and its female chairman was arrested.

Let me quote also the Teacher's speech at the International Congress for Measures Against Prostitution held in Philadelphia in 1911: 'Gentlemen, I know that my words will arouse protests, indignation perhaps, but I feel I must perform my duty as a citizen and speak out resolutely in defence of prostitution. Our society rests on the great principle of free trade and I cannot tolerate any attempt to violate that sacred cornerstone of civilisation. I have, of course, every respect for your anxiety to emphasize the importance of the human body, but no one here present will deny the existence of the mind and the spirit. Why, then, if you ban prostitution, do you hold back from other acts of insanity? Why do you not challenge the journalist's right to sell himself nightly at so much a line? Why do you not set yourselves to defeat the politicians who distribute various earthly goods to their constituents, and the missionaries who regale their neophytes with manna of by no means heavenly origin? The right to own one's body is sacred, and so is the right to sell it for gold or banknotes. The body is a product, but the work of its charming owner is labour. Thus free prostitution combines two rights: that of selling your goods to the consumer and that of selling your labour to the employer. As prostitution is one of the most characteristic expressions of our culture I suggest that, far from fighting it, we should place it under the protection of international law and rank it amongst our most respected institutions, on an equal footing with the Senate, the stock exchange and the Academy of Arts. I call for an immediate vote on my proposal to re-name the congress "International Society for the Propagation of Prostitution".' Julio Jurenito was summarily removed from the hall with the help of the police.

The Teacher often spoke to us about the earthly love of the men of the future. It was as though he slashed through the heavy mists of the ages, and we, astounded, trembled before the indescribable grandeur of thousands upon thousands of human couples joyfully united in their nakedness: not those flabby, shapeless bodies which we are accustomed to see at the

public baths but new, rigorous as steel, yet free. He told us that the way to those ultimate jubilations in the cosmic fields is thorny and harsh. It passes through the denial of love, the insult to the body, through faces covered with veils and copulations measured by callipers. The hour will come when man will forget he has a sex and will offer the woman a chemist's test-tube instead of a kiss. But then he or his grandson (what is time?) will unite his dim, atavistic memories and the thirst for the creation of the best of all possible worlds into a single blissful embrace such as has never been before.

## CHAPTER VII | Ercole Bambucci

FROM HOLLAND we went to Italy where, apart from the instructive visits to monasteries and cathedrals which I have already described, we also occupied ourselves with the investigation of various Chiantis, Barberas and Cinzanos in dirty *trattorie*, the collection of donations for a monument to d'Annunzio to be made out of Carrara marble and 56-carat gold (for this purpose Aysha went round the pastrycooks and hatters' with a collecting box, banging a saucepan and crying 'Evviva!'), and joint public appearances with the Futurists, which, however, were rather monotonous, consisting of a show of passionate admiration for an old broken motor-cycle left to the waiter in a Venice hotel by an American tourist. So the days passed, easy and free from sorrow. The time of departure drew near, for all the churches had already been inspected, all the wines tasted, Aysha's collecting box rattled with four lire eleven soldi and a ring of American gold generously pulled off her finger by a certain Marchesa Nucaputi, and we were finally sick of the Futurists and the motor-cycle.

One hot summer morning we decided to go to Trastevere, our favourite quarter of Rome, for a purpose that was not quite clear—either to see the mosaics of St Parasceva, or drink some innocent Frascati from earthenware jugs, or simply to take leave of the city which had become dear to our hearts. We drove in a carriage and soon, entering the narrow streets of Trastevere, we smelt the marvellous odour of vegetable oil, babies' napkins drying on string stretched across the road, church incense, and houses saturated through and through with sweat and grease—the unforgettable smell of the Eternal City. Soon the cabby stopped the horses and we gazed in bewilderment now at the wheels—all of which seemed to be in their places—now at the end of the little street, from which one of the usual church processions might have been advancing, but from which no one

seemed to be coming at all. The cabby was exchanging fervent and eloquent invective with a man who lay across the road, obviously reluctant to clear the way. The cabby produced arguments: his fares were foreigners, there was no other road to St Parasceva, the road wasn't meant for lying on but for driving along; the man retorted that it was a hot day, he had had to get up twice already, and getting up for a third time was much harder for him than it would be for the cabby to take another street. This argument went on for a long time; it lost its original practical meaning and became a duel of eloquence worthy of the ancient Senate. We got out of the carriage and began to chip in, timidly it is true, as befitted mere amateurs. Mr Cool tried to tempt the lazy fellow with a lira, but the Italian, nimbly picking up the coin with his foot, did not budge. Then the cabby, reaching the ultimate stage of rhetoric, brought out the heavy guns: he threatened the tramp with St Parasceva, the road to whom he was blocking and who would punish him with ulcers, diarrhoea and mosquitoes; the *carabinieri* who would beat him up artistically with knotted wet towels and then put him in jail; Mr Cool's cane, his own whip, and the hoofs of his horses. As all this was no longer on the plane of abstract discussion, the Italian saw no possibility of reply, but only stretched voluptuously, yawned, scratched his behind and then spat high in the air in the direction of the nearest house, hitting the signboard of a midwife over the second floor. This gesture finally captured the Teacher, who had been showing symptoms of *attendrissement* all along. He went up to the Italian, jabbed him amiably in the stomach with his foot and said: 'Would you like to come in the carriage with me? Would you like to live with me for good?' The Italian reflected for a while, but then, evidently growing tired of thinking, spat once more at the same unfortunate signboard, got up, went towards the carriage without saying a word, and settled in the most comfortable seat, which happened to be Mr Cool's. Then he said graciously to the Teacher: 'I'm very hot, but I like you all the same, come and sit next to me', and thus—without thinking it, and generally,



on account of the high temperature and his noble indolence, without thinking anything at all—became Jurenito's fifth disciple.

As we continued on our way the Teacher noticed that his latest fledgling was dressed in a highly original manner, or, rather, wound round with coloured rags which, depending on their position on his body, were described grandly as shirt or trousers. Jurenito offered to take him to a shop where he might choose new clothes to suit his taste. The Italian turned out to be extremely modest in his requirements, for he resolutely turned down a suit and only chose a very tall polished opera-hat, a chauffeur's winter jacket with goatskin on the outside (despite the heat) and, finally, a pair of 'Zephyr' pants, salmon-coloured with an emerald stripe, with which he promptly replaced the rags that had till now fulfilled the function of trousers. Dressed in this unusual garb he began to feel doubly drawn towards the Teacher and even showed signs of some pangs of conscience, for he exclaimed: 'Signor, I am your guide!' At the next corner, as we were passing a three-storeyed house recently gutted by a fire, he caught Jurenito by the sleeve—'look, ruins of ancient Rome!'—after which he fell back exhausted and asked for a lira to buy a jug of wine.

At the Stella d'Italia hotel the courteous porter, restraining his amazement at the sight of the picturesquely dressed tourist, came running towards us with a form which had to be filled in. But the strange guest informed him contemptuously that, 'thanks be to the Madonna, he could not write and would not learn so boring a job even for a second pair of such splendid trousers'. Name? Ercole Bambucci. Where from? He always spent the day lying on the via Pascudini and the night under the railway bridge near San Francisco's church. Occupation? He lost his composure for a moment, looked down at his feet, glanced round as though he had lost something, but in the end cried proudly 'None!'

Mr Cool, Alexey Spiridonovich and even Aysha were greatly intrigued by the Teacher's choice and began putting all kinds

of questions to Ercole, who lay down comfortably on a sofa in the hotel smoking-room. Mr Cool was particularly interested to know Bambucci's 'views on the Bible and the dollar. But the Italian manifested a profound indifference to both. True, on being told that dollars were something of the same kind as lire and even better, he declared that he wouldn't turn them down, adding, however, that it wasn't for Bambucci to go after lire but more or less the other way round. He had often thought that some 'English ass' would find him in the via Pascudini and give him a thousand lire. What for? For being a real Roman, for being Ercole, and anyway—those asses (a gesture in Jurenito's direction) had no Rome of their own, but a lot of money instead. He had other plans, too; for instance, he might marry a rich American woman. 'You're an American? Really? Perhaps you've got a daughter who'd like to marry a handsome and noble Roman, Ercole Bambucci himself? No? What a pity! By the way, your people aren't from Cavi di Lavagna, by any chance? You see, a lot of our fellows have gone from there to America, and that's not a bad way of finding an American uncle. No? Well, never mind, things are very nice as they are. Give me ten soldi. For two soldi you can get a plateful of spaghetti at the counter, for two more a portion of cuttlefish, for four a litre of wine, and for the rest a piece of Toscana, that's a good cigar, as fat as a dog's tail. Or you might spend six soldi on wine and pick up a dozen or so excellent fag-ends near the Colosseum, for all those asses always throw away their half-smoked cigarettes. Then off I go under the bridge, and, believe me, life's a wonderful thing and your dollars are a lot of nonsense.' After this harangue Ercole turned to his favourite occupation; that is, he began spitting in an intricate pattern all round Mr Cool's shoes. The American, feeling extremely uncomfortable, wanted to go away, but Ercole stopped him. 'Don't be afraid! My name isn't Ercole Bambucci if I as much as wet the tip of your shoe.'

However, Ercole was prevented from devoting himself completely to this peaceful pursuit by Alexey Spiridonovich, who began to question him in a voice hushed with emotion. 'Tell

me, do you ever suffer torments, are you rent asunder?’

‘Oh yes, especially in the autumn when the figs and melons are ripe, the colic sometimes won’t let me get to sleep.’

‘No, I mean spiritual torment. How should I explain? Do you ever feel an urge to destroy everything, burn all the old rubbish, be re-born?’

‘Of course! I adore holidays when they bring all the old rubbish out of the houses into the streets, old mattresses filled with straw, one-legged tables, drawers with their bottoms knocked out. They pile everything up in a heap and then set fire to it. The firecrackers go bang-bang! It’s all in honour of the Holy Virgin.’

‘You say “holy”? Does that mean you believe there’s a higher being? A Providence?’

‘Of course I do! What about the “banco-lotto”? No one—no one, do you realise, not even the king—knows what numbers will come up!’

Ercole himself was very fond of trying his luck in the banco-lotto, and once he had joined a pool and had actually won four lire. As for the reason why the world was arranged as it was—yesterday you won some money, today you meet a rich ass, tomorrow you may be dead—that wasn’t worth thinking about, for thinking was very difficult and boring at the best of times and particularly in such hot weather. It would be better if Alexey Spiridonovich were to fetch two Toscanas for the pair of them and then lie down beside Ercole, after which they could smoke and spit round the second shoe of that uncouth American who hadn’t got a daughter and wasn’t an uncle, but only an indeterminate sort of thing with dollars.

Aysha said: ‘You don’t know why Master took him, but I do. I expect he makes gods, like me. I say, Ercole, do you know how to make a god?’

The Italian waxed indignant. ‘Nonsense, whoever makes gods these days? They’ve made so many of them here that there’s more gods than people, and no mistake! Two gods, three saints and a virgin martyr for each Roman. Don’t think I don’t believe

in God'—(Ercole even crossed himself)—'but the fact is I don't want to do anything at all, least of all a boring thing like making gods. If ever I did decide to make anything, it would be braces. They're marvellous things'—(Ercole became animated)—'I've never worn them myself, but I've seen them on Giuseppe Crapapucci and I actually tried to pull them off him at night but he woke up. When I'm forced to get up I can never talk, because if I talk I have to wave my arms, and if I start waving my arms my trousers will fall to the ground. When I'm not lying down I have to hold them up, and that's very tiring. Sometimes I let them go, on trust so to speak, but they've no honour or conscience and they keep slipping down. No, there's definitely nothing better than braces. Listen, if you aren't feeling too hot and you really want to do something, why don't you leave off making your gods and start making braces? Only they've got to be sky-blue or puce.'

Conversations in the course of the next few days revealed to me several pages of Ercole's life history. It appeared that three events had shaken him most deeply: the time he had pinched one of Santa Placida's bones, the time the *carabinieri* had beaten him on account of the woman painter, and the time he made a revolution. The bone was quite small, smaller than your little finger; he said a prayer before he pinched it, and then he gave it to fat Rosalia, who was 'very, very religious indeed, like Santa Placida herself'. Rosalia had wrapped the bone in a silk handkerchief and put it next to a palm branch which had been blessed by the Pope, and she'd given Ercole a piece of roast pork with stuffing and a *fiasca* of wine. The business with the woman painter was not so good. She took it into her head to paint Ercole—'an Englishwoman of some kind, a she-ass'—and the picture she painted was boring, boring, everything just as it really was, even the midwife's shield. Ercole had insisted, first of all, that she should paint him in a top-hat—he'd long wanted one—secondly, that she should put in a palm tree and a bird next to the house and, thirdly, that she should replace the babies' napkins on the line with beautiful

flags. The Englishwoman had refused and had offered Ercole a lira; Ercole had taken the lira, but then he'd gone up to the picture, pushed the woman politely out of the way and got down to the job himself. The Englishwoman had begun to scream as if she were being strangled, and he hadn't even had time to cover the dirty old grey house with beautiful sky-blue paint when two *carabinieri* had appeared and had started beating him, which hurt very much indeed. As for the revolution, that hadn't hurt at all and had been great fun. Somebody in some foreign country—maybe it was Spain—had shot somebody else whom he shouldn't have shot, and so they had made a revolution. To do this they had overturned all the street benches, buses, lamp-posts, and then they'd sung and shouted and fired off guns, right up until it had got dark. That was even better than a holiday; a pity it happened so rarely and was over so soon.

Once we were out riding in Rome, the three of us, the Teacher, Ercole and I. Ercole asked the cabby to drive to Trastevere. In the via Pascudini he got out, took off his goat-skin jacket and his top hat, gave them to me to keep, while he—in his striped pants—lay down in his old place and turned his attention to his favourite signboard, asking us to leave him alone just for an hour.

'They can't understand,' the Teacher said to me, 'why I take this tramp about with me. But what should I love if not dynamite? Ercole isn't Aysha, he has seen everything and has done everything that could conceivably be done. These hands have held all the world's accessories: the sceptre and the cross, the lyre and the chisel, the code of laws and the palette. He has built palaces and arches, temples with the full-bosomed goddesses of Hellas, the emaciated Gothic Christs, the fluttering Baroque saints. Look at him: the Munich prima donna will copy his gestures, St Petersburg's best lawyer will envy his eloquence. He knows everything and can do everything from childhood, but it so happens that he prefers to spit because he has a strong and passionate loathing of all sense and all organisa-

tion. He does everything the wrong way round. Clowning, you say? Perhaps, but isn't the clown haloed with the dying gleams of freedom? He gets his top hat, but he politely hands it to you, to keep. This gesture holds within it the coming renaissance of the world. At the great top-hat factory—remember my words! —Ercole will be with us, like the chaotic love of freedom, like the jar of dynamite packed in the suitcase next to the bottle of brilliantine and the Coty perfume!

As he lay on the ground, half asleep, Ercole listened to our conversation with one ear. Winking slyly, he said: 'I know, you want to make a revolution, like that other one, over the Spaniard. Well, I don't mind a bit, it's good fun. But don't forget I'm your guide, signor! Ten soldi for cigarettes!'

Some of the Teacher's  
reflections on the arts

THE TEACHER did not like talking at length about the arts. Though he approved of conversations on their practical aspects—for example, the quality of paints, the roots of words, and various building materials—he could not bear exalted chatter about art in the metaphysical plane, and asserted that such talk befitted only land surveyors, building contractors and art critics. But since he well understood the organising and destructive forces of art, he was obliged, under various circumstances, to explain his attitude towards it; all the more so as the twenty-three trades mastered by Jurenito during his lifetime included poetry and architecture. I am trying to trace, through some friends living in Mexico, the manuscript of his poem entitled *Trepfert 1717*, written in the days of his youth, after the Teacher had tried converting Indians to Catholicism and before he turned to the annihilation of Mexican generals. From the fragments the Teacher used to recite to me from memory I can judge the merits of this, the only epic poem of modern times devoted to the cult of stocks and shares, advertising publicity for 'North' lorries and the grandiose struggle of races and classes. If—as I should like to hope—the manuscript is not lost, I shall publish it as soon as it comes into my hands, both in the original (it was written in Spanish) and in translations into other languages. In the sphere of architecture I have seen two plans of constructions drawn up by the Teacher. The first represented huge rotating weight-lifting machines, made of steel and equipped with glass baskets, for transporting thousands of people through the air from one end of New York to another. The other plan showed various revolutionary systems of underground *pissoirs* designed for thousands of users. Alas! the file with the projects vanished on the day of the Teacher's tragic death.

I have mentioned Jurenito's works so that it should be clear to all that in him we are not dealing with an amateur, an outsider, but with a man of knowledge and experience. Most of the Teacher's judgments have, in recent years, become the common property of society. All kinds of 'innovators' struggling helplessly in the grip of the obsolete used to follow close on the Teacher's heels, picking up his most casual remarks; and—such was the stupidity of their natures—after clipping the wings of Jurenito's thought they would pass it off as their own. For instance, the editor of a 'terribly progressive' Paris review who claims to be a poet, but in fact plays the fiddle shamefacedly in his back-kitchen and shamelessly writes articles on painting in public, used to make a living solely by waylaying the Teacher with a notebook at the entrance to private views and not leaving his hide thereafter. Jurenito, who did not know the meaning of vainglory and was interested only in the dissemination of his ideas, did nothing to counter such phenomena and even charged me never to accuse anyone of plagiarism and never to write *démentis* to the newspapers. Accordingly, I shall not reproduce here those of Jurenito's sayings about art which are known, if in distorted form, but will mention only some practical steps taken by him in this sphere.

In order that these actions should be understood it is necessary to recall the Teacher's great contempt for the role of art in modern society. Dining with Mr Cool, who under the influence of a vintage Pouilly became sentimental and assured Jurenito that he loved beauty more than anything in the world, even dollars, the Teacher candidly confessed: 'As for me, I prefer these pork chops with green peas'. The Teacher used to say that the meaning of art was that, like other levers of culture, it assisted the organisation of men. It had been so in all the epochs of the history of mankind. Art had welded separate individuals into close-knit national, religious and social units for common love or hatred, work or struggle, in a word, for life. Not only the pyramids and the Gothic cathedrals, but also the melancholy folk-song, the smiling Virgin by an unknown



painter of the Trecento, all this was merely the cement of a grandiose construction, merely the fuel needed to maintain existence.

'What a witless joke, what a pathetic ~~shara-kiri~~ is, then, the arrogant break of art with life! Art solemnly amends its purpose: one of the horses unharnesses itself from the chariot and attempts to slow down its inevitable course by senseless rearing and bucking. Art no longer wants to organise life: on the contrary, its aim is, as it were, to lead man away from life. But since no one, genius though he may be, can jump higher than himself, all these frenzied leaps and bounds remain within the limits of life itself; they can only lead to the greatest possible disorganisation of life. So the struggle between art and life began, so it goes on. Life has found hundreds of other means of organisation; it can get on all right without art, merely becoming harder and more austere than before. And art? Art is transformed into baubles, into a sport practised by a handful of initiates, into different phases of mental illness, into an after-dinner whim of Mr Cool's, less essential than his glass of Cordial-Médoc or his soft pillow. Art is dying, thrice despised, though, thanks to professional training, it can masquerade as the conqueror of life in its last years; it is dying with a romantic dagger in its hand, dying in this private room where the restaurant-keeper, as an afterthought, has hung Matisse's dancers on the wall for the benefit of better-educated Mr Cools, and has invited actors to sob out the dreamy verses of Duhamel and musicians to play the music of Stravinsky. But I, since I believe in the ancient truth that "a live dog is better than a dead lion", refuse to shed any tears over it, and speak out candidly in praise of pork chops with green peas, or even without them.'

In 1913 the *Mercure de France* organised a large-scale literary inquiry into the achievements and possibilities of modern poetry. On receiving the questionnaire Julio Jurenito immediately sent off an answer, which, for some reason, was never published. A copy has been preserved, and I reproduce it here as follows: 'Your questions put me in a very difficult position

because I do not know what is meant by the word "poetry" in the present age. I have, it is true, encountered among the articles in the journals, and sometimes even in the form of separate books, printed in special typography, some disquisitions on politics, love, the holiness of the Trinity or about a coffee-set, with or without rhymed endings. If these curious offerings are what you call poetry, I am unable to answer your questions. Neither do I have any opinion concerning many other senseless occupations, such as playing patience or scratching one's back with the help of a Chinese contrivance. I am perfectly willing to admit, however, that such pastimes may appeal to individuals, and I see nothing wrong with that. I believe that in such cases it is necessary to be completely tolerant, guided by the saying carved on the collar of Diogenes' dog, in the dogs' paradise: "Here, everyone amuses himself as best he can". In other epochs the word "poetry" referred to occupations quite unlike the foregoing, but, on the contrary, both useful and full of meaning. The word itself was an action, and poetry, as a skilful combination of words, assisted this or that act of life. I know the lofty poetry of the primitive witch-doctor who, by a combination of words, used to be able to persuade a stubborn cow to let herself be milked in a state of conscious calm. But how can I apply the same great word to the riddles of Mallarmé, the meaning of which thirty-three loafers have been trying to guess for thirty-three years? Once upon a time the word could kill or cure, it could make a man love or hate. That is why spells and conjurations were poetry. The poets were merely craftsmen, working just like other men. The blacksmith forged the armour, the poet composed the heroic songs which led to victory. The carpenter made the cradle or the coffin, the poet made the lullaby and the dirge. The women spun and sang at their spinning, and the song made their hands quick and confident, their labour light. I have had occasion to read the verses you publish in your esteemed journal, and I have wondered: how can they awaken anyone, call anyone out to fight, whose work can they help forward?

Their sole practical purpose—not, however, arising from the artists' intentions—is to lull a man to sleep, provided the ground has already been prepared by the preceding article on the number of vowels and consonants in the tragedies of Racine. Remembering the splendid craft of the past and comparing it with a pursuit which is incomprehensible to me, I was, I repeat, at a loss to answer your apparently simple question. But my young friend E., a Russian to whom I confided these thoughts, told me a fact of exceptional interest, which to some extent removes my doubts.

‘It appears that in Russia there lives a poet (I regret I cannot recollect the name) who once wrote a poem full of mystical passion and exclamation marks. E. assures me that when, in the town of Tsaritsyn, a certain military scribe declaimed this quatrain to a chambermaid who had, until then, been quite unprepared for a romance with him, the poem’s effect was so decisive that the chambermaid began to unfasten her dress hurriedly of her own accord. This important information convinces me that certain paths are open to poetry in our day, and I am able therefore to reply to you not only with sighs and lamentations, but also with words of hope.’

At a banquet in honour of the latest ‘prince of poets’ held in Paris in January 1914, Julio Jurenito made the following speech:

‘I raise my glass to one of the martyrs of contemporary civilisation. The position of the poet in our society reminds me of that absurd dog, an honest mongrel, who has been put in the zoo with an inscription reading, not *Rover*, not *Fido*, but *Canis vulgaris*. The visitors, prepared for the spectacle of a savage denizen of tropical lands after seeing the lion and the hyena, go up to the dog’s cage, read the incomprehensible Latin, and instead of patting the dog amiably on the muzzle like any other *Canis vulgaris* which simply roams the streets, they open their mouths wide, prod it cautiously with the tips of their umbrellas, and mistake its cheerful bark for a terrible roar and its piteous yelping for the battle-cry of a beast of prey. Then they go away.

'Poor dog! Poor poet! You could be doing an honest job of work, peacefully writing your verses! But they expect anything from you except work. First of all you're a "prophet", secondly a "madman", thirdly a "misunderstood leader". *Canis vulgaris!* The surgeon slitting open a belly, the tailor cutting out a waist-coat, the mathematician studying the laws of time, all these are working. But you, when you sweat over a sheet of paper, when you cross 'out a word for the hundredth time, when you hammer out a good line—that isn't called work, but "creation". And the imbeciles round the cage stare at your bowels: is that where the angel put the "flaming coal"? They wonder: did the muse sleep with you last night? And has "inspiration" descended upon you as a result? The only thing left for you to do is to take the game seriously, open wide your jaw and imitate the lion as best you can. "Fall down before the prophet! I am inspired! Hush, hush!" And the poor, sad, ill-treated dog, working hard to pass for a tiger, makes a lunge through the railings at the nose of some particularly goggle-eyed barber. Well done! Your health, Bengal tiger!'

To Mr Cool's horror, the Teacher was fond of spending many of his evenings in the company of poets, painters and actors. He used to say that a man as devoted to the future as he could afford the weakness of loving some old bric-à-brac, including that merry tribe of gipsies turbulently ending their days in the city squares. 'I love them for their aimlessness, their doom, I don't myself know what for. Each of them taken by himself is young, bold and alive, but together they're older than the mediaeval cathedrals. They have a passionate love of the present, and that is the condemned man's ecstasy before the scaffold. These poor artisans are madly in love with the machine, they strive to convey its forms in sculpture, its clanging and rumble in poetry, refusing to realize that they are doomed to perish under those very wheels. For the machine does not require portrait painters or courtier-poets, it demands the transformation of living flesh into wheels, nuts, screws. Freedom and individuality, the face and the image, must die

in the name of the total mechanisation of life. Rejoice, Mr Cool! These great down-and-outs will die together with love, rebellion and much else. Though, as you know from your favourite book (no, not the blue one, the one in the morocco leather binding), that which dies shall rise again. But never again will these gipsies exist as a picturesque sect, a small, rebellious caste: they are destined to dissolve and be born again in the distant days of purposeless, liberated humanity.'

Once at an exhibition of the work of Italian Futurists the Teacher said to me: 'Here the dead-end reached by modern art is particularly in evidence. Having forgotten how to make useful objects, having lost the sense of the necessity of his work, the painter has begun to compete for the conjuror's bread. What can be more precise, more strict, than the dividing line between the arts of time and space? Yet look at the naïve cunning of this painter who tries to make his motionless canvas tell of man's ability to run. He does not want to know that painting, sculpture, architecture are static not through the accident of their subject but by their very nature, that a perfect painting kills the sense of time itself, stopping all the clocks on the church towers and all the watches in the waistcoat pockets. Then there's the poet who describes in detail a green field, a blue river across the field, a white house by the river, a pink Mimi inside the house and a red rose on Mimi's breast. Never mind that what you get is a colour-merchant's catalogue, never mind that between the field and the rose lie twenty lines, which is hundreds, thousands of years. Never mind: he's performed a trick, too, a trick of the fence-climbing type. Need I speak of the full variety and range of this new trade—of musical painting, relief painting, painted sculpture, onomatopœic verse and all the rest? The bakers have begun to worry about the permanence of bread, the masons are building houses consisting of one wall. At least, after the abolition of art, we shall still have the adventures of Baron Munchausen!'

Shortly after this exhibition Jurenito addressed the following letter to the Italian Minister of Education and Fine Arts:

‘Sir, a few days ago I visited a poor and touching exhibition of the work of my friends, the Futurists. I have also acquainted myself with contemporary poetry and drama. The young Italian painters’ adulation for broken American motor-cycles, bad German toothpaste and last year’s Paris fashions evokes my profound pity. Though hygiene lies outside the functions of your office, let me remind you, sir, of the need to wean the infant from the breast at a certain age, in the interests not only of the mother, but also of the babe. Isolated cases observed of breast-fed children of three and even five years old have resulted, to the best of my belief, in mental deficiency. I personally was convinced of this by the example of my kitten, which continued to suck its mother though it was twice her size, so that, when the teat finally shook it off, the kitten proved unable to feed itself in any other way, grew thin, and presently died. I believe that the impotence and anaemia of modern art are the fault of those who failed to wean it in time from the mother’s breast but, on the contrary, encouraged and still continue to encourage the miserable nuzzling at the last drops of a milk which, by now, has become noxious. In consequence we have the large and apparently well-fed flocks of impotents copying the Renaissance painters or Dante’s tercets for the thousandth time, and side by side with them a few thin, mangy “innovators”, of whom I have already spoken. I am a foreigner, but I sincerely love your country. I venture therefore, Sir, to outline the measures which, in my view, are necessary to save the future generations from perdition. The children must be resolutely weaned from the teat, and with this in mind attention should be paid to those dangerous centres of the sucking epidemic, namely the old cities, the museums and the editions of so-called classics. Though the method of artificially keeping these alive which you apply is highly unhygienic, since no preserving balm can prevent decomposition and therefore infection; though your town councils are tending more and more to replace the corruptible cemetery by the practical crematorium, I hesitate to advise you to choose the radical

method of burning all the images of a dead art, taking into account particularly the attachment felt by many to objects known from childhood, and being guided also by budgetary considerations. But I should like, Sir, to draw your attention to a series of perfectly practicable measures, which, though mere palliatives, would nevertheless prove effective.

1. A general announcement to the effect that Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian (you may add Guido Reni if you think fit), Dante, Torquato Tasso, Leopardi, Milan Cathedral and St Peter's (and so forth, at your discretion) exist. This gives full satisfaction to legitimate feelings of love of the past and national pride.

2. Entry to museums and old churches and the reading of so-called classics to be permitted only to persons in no way associated with art, either as producers or as consumers; to wit, cattle-breeders, art historians and tourists of Anglo-Saxon race.

3. All those actively engaged in art to be resettled at government expense from towns having an artistic past to the industrial centres of Lombardy and Piedmont. Painters attempting to walk through the Roman Campagna and poets going about Venice in gondolas will be proceeded against with particular severity. I am sure, Sir, that these rational measures will result in a true flowering of Italian art. Yours, etc.'

Having dispatched the letter, the Teacher awaited an invitation from the Minister for the purpose of explaining various details of the plan, but no such invitation came. Later the Teacher mentioned to me that he was afraid the letter might have been lost, though he had sent it by registered post in view of the devotion of the Italian post-office to hallowed traditions.

Such were some of the Teacher's opinions on art. Later on I shall describe how he attempted to put a few of them into practice during the years of the Russian revolution.

## CHAPTER IX : Monsieur Delet, or the reincarnation of Buddha

ON OUR RETURN TO PARIS we experienced some financial difficulty due to the Teacher's complicated experiments, Mr Cool's departure for Chicago on business and the reckless extravagance of Alexey Spiridonovich, who was just then going through a particularly pessimistic phase. Wishing to emerge with dignity from this awkward situation the Teacher went straight to an agency which specialised in raising investment capital, and returned, fully satisfied, with the address of a certain *rentier*, a Monsieur Gaston Delet, resident at Massy-Verrières near Paris, who wanted to invest 40,000 francs in a sound business. 'I'll advise him to start a fashionable night-club or a maternity home,' said Julio Jurenito as he went off to see Monsieur Delet.

The next evening, at the Café de la Bourse, the Teacher introduced me to a short, plump gentleman. He had a sparse, carefully curled moustache on a pink tidy face, and the inevitable (in the circumstances) ribbon in his lapel. First we decided to have an aperitif, and M. Delet, slapping his thigh, called '*Garçon, un picon-citron!*' and explained to us that 'it was wonderful for the digestion'. Then he remained silent, while the Teacher spoke. Jurenito's words startled me a little, for he said nothing about a night-club or a maternity home, but instead, with pencil in hand, described in detail the unheard-of profits of a limited company called 'Universal Necropolis'. M. Delet's heart, it seemed, warmed to the Teacher's arguments, but the long series of noughts after the figures worried him a little. 'Why such round figures? Why 300,000 francs? Surely it could be more than that, or less?' Jurenito explained: 'You're right, there's 300,114 francs clear profit'.



Knowing nothing about business I was very bored; my patience, however, was rewarded not only by a splendid dinner, but also by M. Delet's perfectly amazing conversation during it. He announced suddenly that, since both of us were now his partners in an important enterprise, he must acquaint us with his character and his views, for 'this wasn't a love affair, and all cards must be laid on the table'.

It was an extraordinary autobiography, punctuated by pauses to praise the meal and choose the wines. I shall try to reproduce it here, though my memory, alas, is weakened and my pen blunted by the passage of years.

'*Garçon*, you may serve us.

'My dear friend, may I recommend the tunny-fish? A most tender fish and, what's more, so easily digestible. You are surprised by my gaiety? Yes, I am always gay, resourceful and witty. How can I help it? The Gallic wit! You, as foreigners, must be very happy to be in such a country. The home of reason and liberty! Personally, I'd never go abroad—what would be the point? If I want to be by the sea, there's Brittany. The mountains? Savoy! The sun? Nice! Forests? Fontainebleau! Pleasures—hee! hee! Paris! For you, of course, it's different, your country . . . but don't let's talk about depressing things.

'It often makes me sad to think how much gloom still exists in the world. You're a Russian, aren't you? Your country's so cold! But it's very large and, besides, you're our allies. And then you've got that writer . . . oh, how difficult they are, those Slav names! I've got it—Tolstoy! Something like our Dumas. What an excellent salad! Tell me, my friend, wouldn't it be more profitable to buy a Russian *rente* rather than these shares? Are you sure? One feels safer, somehow, with a *rente*. Click, snap, and there it is. I wouldn't advise you to have roast beef—who wants to tax the stomach like that, at night? You Russians are mystics. And you are a Mexican? That's in America, isn't it? Yes, Yes! Uncle Sam! Well, my heart's at rest, you're all wonderful businessmen. Now about myself. I was a genius

even as a child. My late father, the founder of our undertakers' business, used to say to everybody: "Look at Gaston, he'll be a deputy one day!" "But I don't care for politics. It interferes with one's enjoyment of life.

'*Garçon*, a bottle of Nuits, but mind you take the chill off!

'I was telling you that I was a genius. At school I cared only for arithmetic. I can't bear a lot of fancy chatter. Give me clarity, logic! At five I already knew that it was quite all right to thrash Paul, the washerwoman's son, but not Victor, the mayor's son. Hee! hee! the science of life. And I already knew how to hit without leaving any bruises. Surely you know? *Passage au tabac*. But let us continue. When I reached the age of sixteen, my father gave me a louis and said "Gaston, be moderate in all things". Great words! My poor father! How well they prepare asparagus tips here. Alas, I was young! Hee! hee! I forgot my father's words. I lost my sense of moderation. Oh, you cannot know what it is, a sense of moderation! It's rational politics, it's beauty, it's a well-filled purse, an easy stomach, a pleasant tremor at the sight of a pretty woman! It's everything! My friend'—this to the Teacher—'you're still young, I like you—let me go further than that—you are like a Frenchman, you almost *are* a Frenchman—remember: Moderation! Moderation! I was cruelly punished. I contracted a catarrh. Since then I have to be careful, very careful, and take Pink pills—a splendid preparation! I repeat, I was young, fire in the blood, you know! Saint Anthony! Hee! hee! And—so, by the time I was twenty-five I had already lost much of my strength. I'd be walking along the boulevard, a warm sun, so many pretty little chickens, and yet—not a quiver! I have to diet. I used to have a charming mistress, Minette, I'm sure you never had one like that. The things she knew! Hee! hee! She used to say to me "My poor Gaston, remember what Danton said: "*De l'audace, de l'audace et encore de l'audace!*" (that's on the monument by the Odeon station). I bought a painting for sixty francs at an exhibition—a man out shooting rescues a girl from drowning in a brook. I hung it up in

Minette's bedroom. For some reason it encouraged me. What? Elan, my friend! Hee! hee!

'*Garçon*, what's the camembert like? Is it runny?

'But don't think this is going to be all about love. I occupied myself with business. I took over the undertakers', I improved it, I expanded it, I turned it into the best business in the whole Montrouge district. What's death, after all? The end! No kisses, no wine, nothing! A hole! Do smell the camembert—what an aroma! I don't hold with all that claptrap. I'm a free man without prejudices. I was even mentioned in the Chamber of Deputies, well, not exactly personally, but never mind, I was there. You see, I went to stay with my uncle at Perpignan. The mayor there is a broadminded man, a philosopher, a positive Voltaire. He ordered the stones commemorating all those bishops and saints—you know, clerical stuff—to be removed from the church, and had the public lavatory lined with them. Yes, I was personally present at the solemn opening. They've duped us long enough! Then Barrès, the clericalist, asked a question in the Chamber. I was ready to suffer for an idea, but nothing happened. The times of the Inquisition are past. As I was saying, death is the end, and nothing more. Nothing to wait for! But a funeral's got to be decent, like the whole of life. And so I introduced a profound philosophy into my funeral business. Until I came there were fifteen categories. I created two more—one 'luxury class', yes, yes, for idiots who throw their money out of the window. It would be a sin for simple people like us not to pick it up. But it's a glorious funeral! Every lady mourner gets a scented handkerchief. And then, for the poor, a 16th class. I'm a good-hearted man and I love justice. Everyone should have a right to be buried. Why arouse the anger of the poor? That can only benefit criminals and socialists. But, of course, they've got to know their place—all very fair and simple. For three years. You keep your place for three years, and then time's up—give someone else a chance. Starting with the 6th category, a monument in perpetuity. Those are people of substance, they've earned their rest. My

friends, here's an entire system, a world ladder! What depth! I myself should like to have a third or fourth class funeral. That's nice, that's proper. I don't shout: "My name is so-and-so, I must have the luxury class!" No, I say politely: "I am Delet, I've led an honest life, earned my living honestly, now I'm dead, and here's peace, rest, sleep!" Isn't that right? Well, that's enough about death. At forty-one I married. The girl I chose was young and fresh, a Mademoiselle Boé, perhaps you've heard the name? The daughter of a maker of sanitary installations. Another 20,000. Hee! hee! I'll say no more. Work it out for yourself! I was happy: my coffee in the morning, my paper in the evening, and Marie waiting at my side. Alas! Fate decreed otherwise. An unlucky confinement. The boy lives, Marie is dead. Poor Marie!

<sup>2</sup>Garçon, coffee and calvados. What about you? A nectar of the gods! Garçon, three calvados!

'My son. Here's a photograph. A splendid boy! A genius! Only four, but how he can count! I've left him with my sister. Now I am alone. I live quietly. After all I'd been through I sold the business. But I buried Marie myself first. I have worked enough. I've bought a charming villa; now I plant beans and sweet peas in my own garden. Ah, the beauty of nature! I've a little housekeeper. Hee! hee! Zizi. A rosebud! But'—to the Teacher —'you've seen her for yourself! What? Wouldn't you like to? I'm still fresh and strong, I keep going. Now I've decided to place my capital. I wanted a Russian *rente*, but he's convinced me to stick to my own line. "Necropolis": very well, what's wrong with funerals? I've had a good rest the last three years. I'm ready for more work . . . The main thing is to reckon everything up exactly in advance. If there are profits, there'll be calvados, and Zizi, and sweet peas. But moderation, moderation, and life will be beautiful!'

Suddenly M. Delet became visibly tired. Before swallowing his calvados he rinsed his mouth with it, then lay back in his chair, unfastened the lowest button of his waistcoat and became completely immobile.

Then the Teacher said: 'Monsieur Delet shall be my sixth disciple.' For a moment M. Delet seemed to wake up and mumbled: 'A disciple? No! we two shall be equal partners . . . our "Universal Necropolis" will be a great success'. But immediately afterwards he sank back again into total indifference.

'He's ready, he's ripe, he's running, like his own splendid camembert! My child, should doubt ever creep into your soul, take a look at M. Delet and you will understand that the end is nigh. Perhaps there isn't a man in the whole world who has gone so far along the road to the future as he, for out of the deepest night comes the dawn.' Then the Teacher stood up and commanded me to rise too: 'Look again! look at him!'

M. Delet sat staring in front of him with unblinking eyes that were perfect in their vacuity, a dead cigarette stub clinging to his lower lip, one hand crushing a bunch of violets lying on the table, the other lightly toying with trinkets representing Faith, Hope and Charity on the watch-chain which dangled across his stomach.

'Look, this isn't just Monsieur Delet, it is Buddha, the bringer of final peace. There are two ways to Nirvana: through complete refusal, final negation, the way of the ascetic and the rebel; and through the sweetness of being, through ultimate pleasure. Look, Monsieur Delet is no longer on the road to the end: he *is* the end—the ultimate—nothingness!' And, as he said this, the Teacher—and I after him—bowed down reverently before Monsieur Delet. Scarcely turning his eyes in our direction, Monsieur Delet murmured languidly: 'Yes, yes, I know! Your country has some barbaric customs! But now you're in France, you're free men. Better pour me a glass of water, I must take a pill. Otherwise—my stomach, my stomach, my poor stomach!'

## CHAPTER X     Germany: a six mark fine, and Schmidt's organising ability

AT THE BEGINNING of 1914 a marked change occurred in the Teacher's disposition and way of life. Nothing—not the successes of Mr Cool, who, on his return from America, converted to the path of righteousness one genuine Rothschild, two Radical journalists suffering from gout, and more than twenty Papuans brought to Paris for an international stock-breeding exhibition; not the dramatic exploits of Alexey Spiridonovich, who, in view of the non-existence of God and the frivolous behaviour of his latest fiancée, took it into his head to commit suicide, to which end he daily dosed himself before the eyes of this (by no means timorous) lady with fruit salts, alleging that they were potassium cyanide and exacting vows of fidelity; not Flic-Flic, Aysha's new god made in the likeness of the traffic policeman opposite our house, who had particularly impressed my black brother, being cruel and proud and directing the destinies of worlds with his mighty wand—nothing entertained the Teacher any longer. He became serious, almost melancholy; often he would leave us and I would come across him in the company of all kinds of people, e.g. Serbian students, German commercial travellers (the latter suspicious to a degree) and French financiers. Once I even found him with a Russian monk, the favourite of aristocratic ladies, who was shouting at Jurenito: 'I spit at your snout, you toad! Scatter like swinish pearls, Antichrist!', adding immediately afterwards in a whisper: 'throw in another hundred Katenkas\*, sir, and I'll take you just where you want to go'. The Teacher did not explain to us why he sought these people out. Night after night he would pore over tedious studies of such matters as German and British

\* A Katenka is a 100-rouble note.

export statistics, production figures of various coalfields, etc. Maps of African colonies and complicated diagrams now hid the paintings of Picasso and Léger on the walls of his room.

In March the Teacher announced that he had to go to Germany for a few weeks and suggested that we should all accompany him, for the trip would be a highly instructive one. Monsieur Delet at first dug in his heels, saying that he hated the idea of going abroad anyway, and particularly to the Prussians. But the Teacher persuaded him with ease and speed to change his mind.

I was always impressed by Jurenito's resourcefulness and the extraordinary variety of his methods for taming widely differing specimens of humanity. How had he managed to compel the close and calculating *rentier* that was Monsieur Delet to hand over all the money he had made out of burying the dead? How had he persuaded that pudgy Frenchman, who had spent all the forty-five years of his life sitting in his office or in the café at the corner of his street, to abandon his Zizi and his sweet peas in order to follow a shady adventurer to the ends of the earth? Naturally the Teacher did not appeal to Monsieur Delet in the name of the future of humanity; no, he convinced the Frenchman with irreproachable logic that his way was the only one that led to wealth, happiness and the sweetness of life. Events appeared to refute these arguments, for the forty thousand vanished and still there were no profits in view; yet the perfection of Jurenito's calculations remained, and when Monsieur Delet lost heart the Teacher turned up, pencil in hand, to laugh all minor difficulties out of court and point to the heavenly pastures ahead. The Teacher proved to Monsieur Delet that the Germans were bound to be more interested in the 'Universal Necropolis' than any other nation, and that it would be they who, scorning all prejudice, would finally make a going concern of it. 'Nothing for it, business is business,' said Monsieur Delet as he got into the railway carriage, giving Mademoiselle Zizi his final instructions on how to water his favourite carrot-bed.

And so we came to Germany. I must confess we did not feel any too well there. Ercole suffered more than the rest of us, and his sufferings became the weak point in our budget. Not through ill intent but wholly by virtue of his childlike spontaneity he did everything wrong and we were obliged to pay fines on his behalf as often as five times a day. He would light his beloved 'dog's tail' cigar in non-smokers, throw banana peel under the very feet of the *Schutzmann*, walk in those parts of public gardens where walking was forbidden, sit down to rest on the backs of recumbent marble women who, as if to spite us, turned out to be allegorical figures surrounding Bismarck's memorial, and commit many other misdeeds of the same kind. His innocent passion for spitting cost us particularly dear; arrested by a policeman in Frankfort and taken to the station for questioning, he spat—only once and very neatly, as he said—over the top of the cardboard files between the police clerk's head and a bust of the Kaiser into a spittoon in the corner, and was promptly put in jail, whence Jurenito extricated him by paying a substantial sum and producing a medical certificate to the effect that Ercole was suffering from a nervous disease.

Monsieur Delet was very depressed. He lost his cheerfulness and *élan* and said that if all women had such fat calves and all restaurants in the world served boiled potatoes, life would obviously not be worth living. 'Of course the Germans are interested in the "Necropolis". What can anyone in this country do but die?'

Alexey Spiridonovich, also in very low spirits, at last found a master of philosophy from Halle and decided to open his heart to him, expressing all his doubts concerning the existence of logic and illustrating this theme at many points by incidents from his life story. The philosopher, however, remained strangely indifferent. At the start of the conversation he furnished Alexey Spiridonovich with a detailed bibliography on the subject which interested him, but later he politely took back the list of books and instead offered Alexey Spiridonovich the address of a hydro with up-to-date shower baths. Alexey



Spiridonovich comforted himself by relating the same story of his life that very night to Klärchen the waitress, a plump blonde, who shed a heartfelt tear, offered her services 'as a loving sister' at once, and charged only ten marks for everything, for she was trying to save enough to be able to marry Herr Otto, an assistant in a cigar shop.

Aysa suffered simply and quietly from the cold and wrapped himself in the Teacher's tartan travelling rug.

I missed the Paris cafés, and tried in vain to replace the Rotonde by cakeshops with checked tablecloths and waitresses in starched caps.

Only Mr Cool showed no signs of dissatisfaction; he liked travel and regarded Jurenito as a capable guide. In every town we visited he would immediately inquire into the current rate of the dollar, the number of churches and schools ~~and~~ whether there were many establishments where he could install his automatic slot-machines.

In the mornings the Teacher would go off to attend important business meetings; in the afternoons he would go with us to view the towns where we were staying. Everything excited his interest and everything evidently put him in a happy mood. He liked in particular to show us the universities, the barracks and the beer halls; these, in his words, were the 'larvae of a new society'. Slashed about in the course of their periodic duels until they resembled meat cutlets, the *Burschen* sat like obedient children, their fingertips on the lids of their desks, attentively taking in the magnificent construction of the universe as conceived in the pathos of Kant or the sharp-edged intelligence of Hegel, preparing for an honest career as trainers of peasant children or officials in the Excise Department. Watching military exercises, the Teacher admired the uniformly out-thrust chests and pulled-in stomachs, the faces which had lost the last trace of individuality, and that 'right-left' which instantaneously shifted the splendid toy. When the sergeant boxed some undisciplined Fritz or other on the ears for holding his head slightly to one side, everyone, including Fritz, showed

complete satisfaction, for the point at issue was not Fritz's knocked-out tooth but the perfection of the marvellous mechanism. Then we would visit one of the five-storey beer-drinking establishments, where two thousand customers regularly flushed their stomachs with ten to fifteen thousand litres of beer. Everyone sat at identical tables: men, women and children. Waitresses ran up to taps fitted in the walls and in the twinkling of an eye filled dozens of monumental pottery mugs. Then a batch of customers would rise and pass into a large adjoining room to relieve themselves, so that they might be able to continue the interrupted work. This, incidentally, was described as entertainment; an orchestra played military marches, some of the fathers read humorous magazines and laughed resoundingly, while others stared dully at the walls hung with various proverbs and wise sayings such as: 'Drink without worry, God is watching over this house', and the like.

'Look,' the Teacher would say after such an excursion, 'everywhere else people live simply for the sake of a peaceful existence, for their innocent pleasures; they live, they say they love, they fall ill and suffer, then they die. But here, with clenched teeth, from morning till night, people possessed by a single will—in the schools as on the parade-grounds and in these beer-halls—are forging great chains for others—for others and for themselves—or else, perhaps, the finest steel swaddling-clothes for their dearly loved children.'

Once, on a walk through Stuttgart, as we passed the magnificent flowerbeds of the public gardens, something happened which was exceptional for Germany and which put Ercole into a state of ecstasy. Walking towards us along a deserted path came a poor woman with a baby in her arms and a young student in an oilcloth cap, meek and dreamy in appearance. The student addressed the woman politely and, after speaking to her for a couple of minutes, went and stood aside in deep thought. So far everything had been quite normal, but what happened next was unimaginable. The student calmly stepped over the railing surrounding a flowerbed and started assiduously

trampling the first March hyacinths. 'There, there's a gesture for you!' cried Ercole, transported. 'Now they'll nab him, like they did me, remember?' But there was no one about. After waiting a little the student went to the gate and, finding a policeman, addressed him. This was irresistibly curious and we came close to listen. Here is what the student reported to the *Schutzmann*:

'My name is Karl Schmidt. I'm a student at the Technical College. I have just trampled a flowerbed in the park in protest against the bad organisation of the State.' The policeman heard him unmoved and took out his receipt book.

'You'll have to pay a fine of six marks.'

'I've only got two marks eighteen pfennig:

'Then kindly follow me.'

We went along too and entered the police station, leaving only Aysha and Ercole outside to avoid putting temptation in their way or in that of the police.

'Explain your action,' the officer on duty said to Schmidt.

'I was protesting against the absurd system of social economy. In the park I met Frau Müller, a widow of a stonemason's labourer. Last year she used to do my washing at a cheap rate. She asked me whether I knew of any work for her as she had been having a very hard time since her husband's death. Frau Müller has a child at the breast, and she cannot find a job. She told me that she had been obliged to pawn her blanket and that she was losing her milk as a result of insufficient nourishment. Then I looked at the flowerbeds in the public park. Large sums are spent on maintaining them, yet Frau Müller's son, a member of society, a future elector to the Reichstag, may die for lack of milk. I am not in the least sorry for Frau Müller, though she is a perfectly decent woman. I am prepared to condone the annihilation of a thousand babies for the good of society, but I cannot bear such senselessness. I trampled on the flowers—which anyway I detest as patently useless objects—to draw the attention of society, the press and the Government to these shameful contradictions.'

The policeman took down the statement without saying a word. Then he asked about the six marks. 'You may serve a prison sentence in lieu of the fine.' At that point the Teacher intervened. He offered Schmidt the missing 3 marks 82 pfennigs as a friend, saying that a man of such intelligence must not waste his time in a place of detention.

Then all of us, including Aysha and Ercole, went off to Schmidt's room. He lived in an attic, so small that we were obliged to stand motionless all the time—as on a tramway platform—but scrupulously tidy. The walls were covered with portraits of various persons, to wit, Kaiser Wilhelm, Karl Marx, the philosopher Kant, Herr Aschinger, the owner of 270 restaurants in Berlin whose organising talent Schmidt greatly admired, and a large ruled timetable entitled 'System of distribution of week-days and holidays of Karl Schmidt, student of the Stuttgart Technical College'. All Schmidt's time, from 7 in the morning when he woke until 11 at night when (except on Saturdays) he went to sleep, was strictly divided between various occupations. Thus from 10 to 11 p.m. on Saturdays Schmidt devoted himself to love. He explained to us that love did not interest him much and that he had even intended to remain a virgin, but this would have required time and an effort of will which he needed for more serious purposes. He had therefore taken the advice of a medical student he knew, and had decided to sacrifice an hour a week, to which end he had selected a modest but hygienic establishment kept by a Frau Hase.

As soon as he came home, Schmidt for reasons of economy (he lived on only 60 marks a month) took off his suit, which had already served him for four years, and put it away carefully in a trunk—for there was no other furniture in the room—remaining thereafter in his underwear. From our talks with him we learned many picturesque details which bore witness to his passion for order and method. It appeared that, apart from the timetable, he had another chart, devoted to the sixty marks and covering all his expenses, from laundering his socks to Frau Hase's Saturdays. Five months previously

Schmidt had received a supplementary three marks from his mother 'for a little pleasure'. He had pondered for a long time on how he might spend the money wisely without disobeying his mother's injunction. He wanted to buy a new set of drawing instruments, but this cost four marks. Then he thought of celebrating his Aunt Bertha's birthday by going to the Metro-pole café and having a cup of coffee and a slice of cherry cake with whipped cream, but this would have cost only 60 pfennigs and the remaining sum would have been even more difficult to spend. The three marks continued to lie in his trunk, and Schmidt explained that he could not, on account of the respect he bore his mother, give them to Jurenito. Talking of pastries, Schmidt expressed his indignation at the fact that in the cake-shops they often went bad, for the fools could not calculate how many they would sell in a given day. He was equally shocked by his landlady who peeled her potatoes raw, so that at least 30% of the total was lost.

The conversation then turned to serious matters. Schmidt was greatly interested in all of us. Aysha's presence disconcerted him, and he confessed that he could not bear the thought of the vast territories of Africa remaining in a state of primitive chaos. He was, however, an optimist and believed in a better future. The most important thing was to organise the whole world as he had organised his life, for he was convinced that he lived better and more wisely in his attic on 60 marks a month than any multi-millionaire. He was able to be a nationalist, a follower of the Kaiser and a socialist all at the same time. In substance they were identical. Both Wilhelm and any socialist realised that the world was not organised, and must be organised by means of force. 'Our enemy is anarchism, regardless of whether it is represented by Herr Bambucci, a revolutionary with a bomb, or by Herr Delet, who may become a Minister tomorrow, but will always remain a *rentier* who recognises only the pleasures of life.' (Acting as interpreter, I translated this sentence to Monsieur Delet, who was deeply offended by it, particularly at being lumped together with

Ercole, whose mere presence was an embarrassment to him). He, Schmidt, was doing a great deal of work in many fields of mechanics, chemistry and political economy. He had worked out a large number of plans, though unfortunately it would be difficult to put these into effect in the prevailing disorder. Take, for example, the final dissociation of complicated sexual problems from the fundamental question of population increase. He insisted that artificial insemination was a practicable possibility. Unfortunately he was unable to carry out the necessary tests. He was certain of success. And, for that eventuality, he had worked out a law on compulsory childbearing. Further, a no less important question: the replacement of basic nourishment by chemicals; elimination of hunger and poverty, a gain of billions of working hours. But when, when would he be able to turn at ~~last~~ to practical work? Here was Wilhelm playing with pacifism and the socialists becoming tamer and tamer every year. Where was salvation to come from?

All these remarks, which I translated, provoked an outburst of indignation. Monsieur Delet tried hard to be calm and even, remembering where he was, logical.

'Very well! Let's suppose that all this nonsense can be put into effect. Then what? Instead of an *escalope à la jardinière*—a pill (as if I didn't have enough with my Pinks), instead of Zizi . . . What horror! Neither nature nor beauty, neither love nor appetite! Only a timetable! But ask him, ask him—what would be the point of living?'

Ercole declared simply that if we were not in this accursed Germany where they fined you for everything—but absolutely everything—and at home in Italy, he would immediately stick a knife into that scoundrel. What a louse! And he had thought, earlier in the park, that here was an honest fellow!

Alexey Spiridonovich was unable to utter. Squeezed against the door by Mr Cool he suddenly burst into floods of tears and babbled 'Save us, save us! Lord, Lord, Lord, have mercy!' As for me, the feeling Schmidt produced in me was one of confusion and even fear, as in a factory when faced with an

incomprehensible machine in motion, capable of cutting off a workman's head if he doesn't look out.

Despite all our protests and tears, the Teacher pushed his way through to Schmidt and said: 'I knew you at once for what you are. You shall be my seventh and last disciple. Your hopes are destined to come true sooner than you think; believe me, I shall assist you in this. You others, look: here is one of those destined, now and for a long time to come, to stand at the helm of humanity'.

Schmidt stood there, smiling good-naturedly, Schmidt with his curly head, large glasses and patched shirt. He heard the Teacher to the end, and briefly answered: 'Very good, Herr Jurenito!'

## CHAPTER XI     The Teacher's prophecy concerning the destinies of the tribe of Judah

ON A LOVELY APRIL EVENING we forgathered once again in the Teacher's Paris studio on the seventh floor of one of the new buildings in the Grenelle quarter. We stood for a long time by the large windows, admiring the beloved city with its unique, insubstantial, unreal twilight. Schmidt, too, was with us, but I tried in vain to convey to him the beauty of the dove-grey houses, the stony groves of the Gothic churches, the leaden reflections in the slow Seine, the chestnut trees in flower, the first lights in the distance and the touching song of a hoarse-voiced old man with his barrel-organ underneath the window. Schmidt said that all this was excellent for a museum, but that he had detested museums from childhood; one thing that did enchant him was the Eiffel Tower, so light, so slender, swaying in the wind like a reed, the indomitable iron bridge to another age silhouetted against the tender blue of an April night.

Amid such peaceful talk we awaited the Teacher, who was dining with some important businessman. He soon came in and, after putting away in a small safe a pile of documents which had been thrust untidily into his pockets, said to us cheerfully:

'Tonight I've done good work. Things are looking up. Now we can rest and chat for a while. But first, before I forget, I must draw up the text of the invitations, and you, Alexey Spiridonovich, will take them tomorrow to the Union printing works.'

Five minutes later he showed us the following:

Solemn Performances  
of the  
Destruction of the Tribe of Judah



will take place shortly in  
Budapest, Kiev, Jaffa, Algiers  
and many other places.

The programme will include, apart from the traditional

### POGROMS

— a public favourite —

a series of historical reconstructions in  
the spirit of the age,

e.g. burning of Jews, burying same alive, sprinkling of  
fields with Jewish blood, as well as modern methods of  
'evacuation', 'removal of suspicious elements', etc., etc.

This invitation is extended to cardinals, bishops, archi-  
mandrites, British lords, Roman noblemen, Russian  
liberals, French journalists, members of the Hohenzollern  
family, Greeks regardless of profession or trade, and all  
others wishing to attend.

Time and place to be announced later. Entrance free.

'Teacher!' Alexey Spiridonovich cried in horror. 'This is  
unthinkable! The twentieth century and such vile doings!  
How can I deliver such a notice to the Union—I who have  
read Merezhkovsky!'

'You are wrong to think that the two are incompatible. Very  
soon, in two years' time perhaps, or in five years', you will be  
convinced of the contrary. The twentieth century will turn out  
to be a very jolly and frivolous age, without any moral prejudices  
whatsoever; and the readers of Merezhkovsky will be the most  
enthusiastic audience at the performances. The diseases of  
mankind, don't you see, are not the measles of infancy: they  
are old, deep-seated attacks of the gout, and certain habits  
have been formed in the course of time concerning their cure.  
You don't break a habit in your later years.

'When, in ancient Egypt, the Nile went on strike and drought

set in, the wise men would remember the existence of the Jews, who would be summoned and slaughtered to the accompaniment of prayer; and the earth would be sprinkled with fresh Jewish blood: "May famine pass us by!". Naturally this could not replace either rain or the Nile in flood, but nevertheless it gave some satisfaction. Even at that time, it is true, there were some cautious people of humane views who said that killing a few Jews wouldn't do any harm, of course, but sprinkling the earth with their blood was a bad idea because this blood was poisonous and would produce thistles instead of wheat.

'In Spain, whenever there was an epidemic—of the plague or the common cold—the Holy Fathers would solemnly proclaim forgiveness for the "enemies of Christ and mankind" and, shedding profuse tears (not, however, profuse enough to put out the pyres) would burn a couple of thousand Jews. "May the pestilence pass us by!" The humanitarians, fearing the high temperature of the fire and ash which the wind wafted everywhere, would whisper guardedly in each other's ears—lest they be overheard by some stray Inquisitor—"Wouldn't it be better just to starve them to death?"'. . .

'In Southern Italy, during the earthquakes, people would at first run away to the North, then come back cautiously, one by one, to see whether Mother Earth was still shaking. The Jews would also run away—in fact before anyone else—and also come home—later than anyone. Naturally, the earth shook either because they—the Jews—had wanted it or because it—the earth—had not wanted the Jews. In either case it was advisable to take representatives of the tribe and bury them alive, which was done with all speed. What did the progressive folk say? Oh yes: they were very much afraid that the buried Jews would make the earth shake still more.

'There, my friends, is a short excursion into history. And since humanity is to experience both famine and pestilence, as well as a goodly amount of earth-shaking, I am merely looking ahead in a commonsense way by having these invitations printed in advance.'

'But Teacher,' Alexey Spiridonovich retorted, 'aren't the Jews men like ourselves?' During Jurenko's 'excursion' he had sighed loud and long and wiped his eyes with his handkerchief, but moved to a place fairly far from my side, just in case.

'Of course not! Are a football and a bomb one and the same thing? Do you think the tree and the axe can be brothers? You can love the Jews or hate them, you can regard them with dread as fire-raisers or with hope as saviours, but their blood is not yours, nor is their cause your cause. You don't understand? You refuse to believe? Very well, I'll try to make it clear to you. The night is calm and cool; let us amuse ourselves with a rather childish game over a glass of Vouvray. Tell me, my friends, if you were asked to keep just one word from the whole of human language—namely "yes" or "no"—and discard the rest—which would you choose? Let us begin with the oldest. You, Mr Cool?'

'Of course I'd choose "yes": the affirmation and the basis. I don't like "no", it's immoral and criminal. Even when a workman I've just sacked entreats me to take him back to work I do not say to him that harsh and bitter word, "no"; I say "wait a while, my friend, you'll be rewarded for your sufferings in the next world". When I show my dollars, everyone says "yes" to me. Destroy any words you like, but leave the dollars and the little word "yes", and I'll undertake to cure humanity of all its ills.'

'I'd say that both "yes" and "no" were extremes,' said Monsieur Delet, 'whereas I like moderation in all things: the golden mean, you know. But still, if the choice must be faced, I'll say "yes". "Yes" is joy, *élan*, what else? Everything! Madame, your poor husband is dead. A fourth class funeral, *n'est-ce pas*? Yes! *Garçon*, a Dubonnet! Yes! Zizi, are you ready? Yes, yes!'

Alexey Spiridonovich, still shaken by what had gone before, could not collect his thoughts, made mooring noises, jumped up several times, sat down again and finally yelled: 'Yes! I believe, O Lord! Communion! The sacred "yes", the "yes" of Turgenev's pure young girls! O, Liza! Come, O dove!'

Schmidt, who found the whole game completely ridiculous, declared briefly and in a businesslike manner that the dictionary should really be revised with a view to expunging certain unnecessary, archaic words such as 'spirit', 'sacred', 'angel', etc.; 'yes' and 'no', however, must be retained, being serious words. Last night, if he had had to make a choice, he would have chosen 'yes' as a word having an organising function, something like a good rivet.

'Yes! Si!' replied Ercole. 'On all pleasant occasions in life they say "yes"; you only hear "no" when you're being thrown out on your ear.'

Aysa, too, preferred 'yes'. When he begged Kruppto (the latest god) to be kind, Kruppto said 'yes'. When he asked the Teacher ~~for~~ two sous to spend on chocolate, the Teacher said 'yes' and gave him the money.

'Why don't you say anything?' the Teacher asked me. I had not replied earlier, afraid of vexing him and my friends.

'Teacher, I cannot deceive you. I would keep "no". Candidly speaking, I'm always rather pleased when something goes wrong or breaks down. I'm very fond of Mr Cool, but it would give me pleasure if he were suddenly to lose all his dollars; yes, simply lose them like a button, down to the last one. Or if Monsieur Delet's clients mixed up all the categories. Imagine what would happen if the man with a class 16 burial—three years' tenure, you remember—suddenly got up and cried: "bring out your scented handkerchiefs, I want the luxury class!" When the purest young girl who has been running round this dirty world picking up the hem of her skirt, making a great to-do of her virginity, meets a resolute tramp in a little wood outside the town, that's not bad either. Or when the waiter slips and drops a bottle of Dubonnet: I love that. Of course it's as my great-great-grandfather, that clever fellow Solomon, said: "There is a time to gather stones and a time to cast them". But I'm a simple man, I've got only one face, not two. No doubt someone'll have to gather them, maybe Schmidt. As for me, believe me I'm not trying to be original if I say in

all conscience: destroy "yes", destroy everything in the world, and then "no" will remain of its own accord.'

While I was speaking, all my friends who had been sitting next to me on the sofa moved into the opposite corner. I was left by myself. The Teacher addressed Alexey Spiridonovich:

'Now you see that I was right. A natural division has taken place. Our Jew is left alone. You can destroy all the ghettos, wipe away all the reservation boundaries, dig up all the frontiers, but there's nothing to fill those ten feet which separate you from him. All of us are Robinson Crusoes, or convicts if you prefer; the rest is a matter of personality. One man will tame a spider, study Sanskrit and lovingly sweep the floor of his cell. Another will bang his head against the wall: crack! a bump—another crack! and another bump, and so on: what'll prove stronger, the wall or his head? The Greeks came along and looked round—the place could have been more comfortable to live in, it's true; without disease, or death, or suffering, something like Olympus. But it couldn't be helped, this was where they had to live. And so, to keep their spirits up, they decided to proclaim every discomfort, including death (you couldn't abolish the discomforts anyway), as the greatest boon. The Jews came along and crack! it's the head against the wall at once. "Why is this place as it is?" You have two men, why shouldn't they be equal? But no, Jacob finds favour, Esau's out in the cold. And so it begins: the undermining of heaven and earth, of Jehovah and the kings, of Babylon and Rome. The ragged beggars who spend their nights on the steps of the temple work away, concocting a new religion of justice and poverty, as though mixing an explosive in a cauldron. Now just watch unconquerable Rome go flying head over heels! The poor, ignorant, dull-witted sectarians come out against the beautiful order and wisdom of the ancient world. Rome trembles. The Jew Paul has conquered Marcus Aurelius. Yet ordinary people, who prefer a cosy little house to dynamite, begin to settle down in the new faith, making the bare hut homely and pleasant. Christianity is no longer a wall-beating

machine, it has become a new fortress. Terrible, naked, destructive justice has been replaced by human, comfortable, india-rubber mercy. Rome—the world—has withstood the onslaught. But seeing this the tribe of Judah repudiated its child and started undermining once again. At this moment there's undoubtedly someone in Melbourne, sitting alone, sapping away, not in deed but in thought. Again they're mixing something in the cauldrons, again they're preparing a new faith, a new truth. Forty years ago the gardens of Versailles shivered with the first access of fever, just like the gardens of Hadrian long ago. Rome prides itself on its wisdom, the Senecas write their books, the brave cohorts stand ready. It trembles again, Rome the unconquerable!

'Israel has borne a new child. You will behold its wild eyes, red hair and little hands that are as strong as steel. Having given birth, Israel is ready to die. A heroic gesture: "there are no more nations, I am no more, but *we are*". Oh, naïve, incorrigible sectarians! They'll take your child, wash it, dress it, and it'll become exactly like Schmidt. Once more they will say "justice", but they'll replace it by expediency. Once more you'll go away to hate and wait, beat your head against the wall and moan "how long?" I will tell you: until the day of your madness and theirs, until the day of infancy, a distant day. Meanwhile the tribe will be drenched once more in the blood of parturition in the squares of Europe, giving birth to another child which will betray it.

'But how should I not love that spade in the thousand-year-old hand? It digs the graves, but does it not turn up the soil of the fields too? It will be shed, the blood of Judah, the invited guests will applaud, but (remember the whispers of long ago?) the blood will only make the earth still more poisonous. The world's great medicine!'

And the Teacher came up to me and kissed me hard on the forehead.

## The Teacher's mysterious travels and the disciples' frivolous behaviour

THOSE WERE DAYS of an exceptional brightness: it was as though sky-blue enamel and liquid gold had been poured over the grey streets. I have seen many springs, southern and northern, tender, blissful and cruel, but that spring wasn't a mere season—the latest in a succession of myths—but something vehement and festive, lavishing—though it was spring—all the sweetness of autumn's anticipation of death, something unique. A late spring, and one which imperceptibly, without thunder, without tears, slipped into a confused and airless summer.

For the first time since the memorable night at the Rotonde I felt lonely, weak and lost. The Teacher was always leaving Paris for Germany, for Vienna, for London. He categorically refused to disclose anything about these trips, so that I never did find out why he had hurried to meet a certain big industrialist in Berlin or what he had done for a whole fortnight in dear old, gay old Vienna. Dressed in his loose travelling coat, carrying the inevitable briefcase, changing from one continental express train into another, he appeared to me now as a hunter prowling round the capitals of Europe to flush the beast out of its secret lair, now simply as my aunt Marya Borisovna fussing about before the guests arrived for a birthday party and rushing every other minute from the kitchen into the room prepared for dancing.

'What's the Teacher up to?' I would think in torment as I sat at the Rotonde, which I now valued all the more highly as the scene of my conversion. Was he creating a new religion? Or preparing to blow up the palace of some magnificent rajah? I would paint wild and glorious pictures in my imagination:

expeditions to Central Africa, sermons of a new Savonarola in the Place de l'Opéra, ecstasy descending upon the House of Lords, with all the lords, carried away on a spontaneous impulse, tearing off their robes and joining in an innocent game of leapfrog. But all these images would fade as soon as I remembered the terrible diagrams on the Teacher's walls, somehow reminding me of Schmidt as he trampled the curly pink petals of budding hyacinths with his large boots that looked rusty with age.

I began to drink a great deal and, following the good advice of a friend of mine—a young sculptor—I would swallow two or three grains of hashish from time to time in my anxiety to comprehend the events. Alas, reality receded further and further. At the Rotonde I would fancy myself now an ichthyosaurus, and stamp on the hats of the artists' models in prehistoric rage; now the rajah whose palace the Teacher planned to blow up, and write letters to insurance companies, insist on ritual salutations from the café proprietor, and shed bitter tears. None of this surprised anybody; the wave of lunacy had flooded everything that spring, including the little café in Montparnasse. I found myself constantly in the company of a striped zebra which implored me to repaint its hide in cubes, a fat painter who insisted that he was in his seventh month and would give birth to a prophetic ape in a hat with ostrich feathers—the feathers, he said, tickled him terribly—and a mulatress who had run away from a music-hall and swore that Bergson the philosopher had commanded her to conquer Polynesia, but meanwhile—for no apparent reason—slapped my cheeks with slices of roast beef stolen from the counter. I painted the zebra with ink, gave friendly advice to the painter, and when the mulatress slapped me I wept: why was she so horrid? Why wasn't my palace insured? Why had there been the flood? Why must I suffer here alone, forsaken by the Teacher? And anyway, was this I at all? And I would feel my sweating, hairy chest under my shirt, and having assured myself that it was indeed I—Ilya Ehrenburg, Ilyusha, the poet,



‘Erinbourg’—I would protest and suffer more bitterly than ever.

During one of his brief stays in Paris the Teacher found me under a seat at the Rotonde, confiscated the magical grains, fed me with scrambled egg and took me back to our friends. He left for England the same day and left us instructions not to separate: if we insisted on going off our heads, we should do it together, all seven of us. I saw at once that something was wrong with my friends too, though—it is true—without the zebra or hashish. They were all obviously upset and dispirited by the Teacher’s absence. Monsieur Delet complained that the Universal Necropolis was in a bad way; Mr Cool was bored; Schmidt could not work owing to the disorganising nature of the Paris spring; the others need hardly be mentioned. Having managed somehow or other to get to the bottom of my own condition, I proposed—in view of the general discontent and the Teacher’s absence—that we should treat ourselves to a thoroughly dirty time, as I sensed very well that the opportunity of that never-to-be-repeated spring ought not to be missed. Monsieur Delet started saying something about moderation and his age, but not very energetically, for—lacking *élan*—he was fond of watching others amuse themselves and sometimes, despite his meanness, went so far as to stand his clerk Lebain a dinner in return for the right to stay to the end in the private room of the restaurant.

And so Mr Cool tore out yet another leaf of his cheque book (mentioning the ‘changing of water into wine’ as he did so) and we went on the razzle. Gradually we collected all kinds of people, with some of whom we spent whole weeks at a time without knowing their names or even their nationalities. Two of them, however, remain firmly fixed in my memory. The first, a Polish poet called Ozarevski, was brought along by Ercole straight from the police station, where both had spent the night: the Italian because, feeling hot, he had attempted to bathe in one of the fountains of the Tuileries; the poet on the insistence of an old and virtuous concierge whom he had molested after emptying a

bottle of madeira, insisting that she should transform herself into a Bacchante and cry 'Evoe!' with him at the house door. Ozarevski was very proud, wore his black hair shoulder-length, despised all earthly things so much that he hardly touched the ground as he went from tavern to tavern—which meant that he skipped about on tiptoe despite his forty years—and generally looked down on all that was materialistic and coarse. He claimed descent now from a Spanish grandee, now from Osiris himself, spoke a high-flown language, exacted utter veneration from everyone—which is why he regarded any restaurant bill as an insult: 'the poet drinks the golden-foamed liquid, his song struck from quivering strings is ample recompense'—and wrote poetry on all inappropriate occasions. Furthermore, to use coarse and materialistic language, he was a terrible womaniser and could not let a single skirt pass by, regardless of its owner's age, without trying his luck. He succeeded best of all with very innocent Polish girls who came to study at the Sorbonne, knew his poems about 'celestial love' by heart and regarded it as a special favour of Providence to be singled out by the 'genius of the black locks'. Ozarevski had been thrashed more than once for his 'celestial loves'—on one occasion (with wet goloshes) to the point of losing consciousness—but he did not lose heart. He amused us greatly by bravely accosting old American women, little girls playing in the Jardins du Luxembourg and café singers already booked by other gallants, and repeating more or less the same thing to all of them, namely: 'fire—god—Osiris—come tonight'. Once when we were just finishing a three days' drinking bout at Versailles he caught a glimpse of an appetising-looking wench in a dairy and, on his return to Paris, immediately sent her the following telegram: 'You are a lotus shall wait 11 p.m. hôtel du cheval blanc room no. 16 your troubadour'.

The other, a bankrupt banker from Venezuela, a Señor Maduros, was an old friend of the Teacher. Wherever he was, in whatever company, a pack of cards would always appear on a chair, on his lap, on a street bench. He would play any

game for any stakes. It was said that his real name was Capandez and that he had become Maduros after an incident at Monte Carlo where, by agreement with the croupier and two officials of the Casino, he had performed a small operation before the beginning of the game, bending back the dividing slats on the tables. After that, having won 180,000 francs, he had fled not only from the police but also from his associates in the venture, and had successfully managed to spend his winnings in San Sebastian in three days. He was a dark and very elegant gentleman, but he shaved badly and used to put powder on his black bristles, as a result of which he looked pale blue in the face, a peculiarity which he regarded as extremely smart. While we drank, Maduros would play cards with all and sundry: other customers, waiters, once even with a policeman, and when no one at all was left he would play snap with Aysha for an orange or a cigarette. Under our very eyes he lost about 300,000 francs, a house in Venezuela, a villa at Ostend and his wife (it should be mentioned that Maduros was not only completely broke—he used to have to borrow two francs from Mr Cool for his dinner—but also single); as for his winnings, if you did not count the astronomical figures which always remained no more than figures, they amounted to round about fifty francs, someone's mistress and a large sporting dog, which never left our side and insisted on bones for his dinner from dear Mr Cool, the universal provider.

When the first pale lights appeared on the boulevards, we would all forgather in a small café in the rue Faubourg Montmartre, and would soon go on from there in a noisy crowd. Huge green and crimson spiders ran all over the walls on their electric paws, exhorting us to drink Cointreau. Well-built youths and biblical old men in red top-hats called to us 'If you want happiness—come to the Royal!' And a mad motor car, growling and flashing its yellow eyes like the archangel's steed, made straight for us, urging us to smoke Navy cigarettes.

Obediently, we would go to the Royal, drink Cointreau, smoke Navy cigarettes. Hundreds of waiters, important-looking,

bald and wise like Roman Stoics, rushed about, overtaking each other, juggling with bottles, pouring something into glasses as they ran, jangling coins. Oh, those pyramids of bottles, long as ninepins, round as balls, with their mysterious seals or their Seville beauties—green, yellow, red, white bottles, bottles of all imaginable colours! Behind the counters, alchemists in white aprons, using English instead of Latin, would concoct strange mixtures. Victory columns, hundreds of *colonnes de Vendôme* built of plates and saucers, grew up on the tables. Rumanians, Hungarians, Negroes howled through their trumpets, tore the strings of their instruments in a frenzy, wheezed and growled. Then the women would come running out—a mysterious tribe, almost faceless, with fringes of hair hanging over their eyes, with brightly-painted targets for kisses, with bare breasts, with well-padded hips agleam with sequins, shot silk, gems and ribbons. They descended like locusts, chattering, jumping on to the tables, dancing between the bottles, falling on the customers' knees, twisting feverishly, suddenly leaping up again and coming to rest somewhere in the corners, on the deep sofas. And the men would leap up too, their waistcoats stained with wine, their top-hats squashed; they would circle aimlessly, rustling the banknotes taken from their wallets, and finally run away, taking with them two women, three, ten, without counting them.

We would walk along the streets and they would overtake us, those passionate throngs, now in pairs as for the quadrille, now in a dense spiral line. We would go into the small bars and the same bottles would tilt again at once, the sous rattled, the red-lipped girls rushed forward, the toes of their shoes struck the zinc counter, they pressed themselves against us and dragged us to their rooms. At every step the hotels leered at us, as though exposing to the streets 'their huge, dirty, sagging beds.' Paris stank of powder, alcohol and sweat.

We would go to the market and stare till we felt sick at the enormous carcasses, the mountains of eggs and cheeses, the vast slabs of butter, the monstrous lobsters and the flowers

crushed into colossal bales. Then the day-shift would rush out into the streets. Hordes of motor cars deafened us with their screaming and hooting, stunned us with the smell of petrol, heat and dust. Outside the big stores that were as large as cities, on the broad pavements, fierce crowds of women rummaged among the piles of bright dress-lengths, the pyramids of silks, the oceans of ribbons and laces: sweating, greedy women intoxicated by the rustling, swishing, crackling of the fabrics.

At noon the odours from a thousand kitchens, the smell of grease, fish and onion pervaded everything. On restaurant terraces, to the right, to the left, everywhere, men with purple necks masticated steadily, with perseverance, picked their teeth, munched, belched. Then we would go to bed and, waking in the evening, find the same madness.

This was the filth of surfeit, the despair of wealth, the deep sleep of plethora. Too many rags, too many poets, women, flowers, bottles, too many people! Too much of everything! Meanwhile the sun—inexorable, bright, almost hostile—poured bucketfuls of corrupting heat on the bodies, the crumpled flowers, the bald heads. Just one more day, it seemed, and not apocalyptic thunder, no, sheer apoplexy would strike the town that had over-eaten, over-drunk, over-slept on its colossal feather bed.

On one of those July nights the Teacher returned at last to Paris and went with us to visit a night-club. On the way I gave him an incoherent account of everything—the advertisements, Ozarevski's adventures with the ladies, my own horror of Paris—and ventured to ask him what he was doing, whether he had not forgotten me and all of us, and what was going to happen next. He was not angry but only said briefly: 'Things are going well, but better tell me more about that poet'. The Teacher had changed dreadfully during the past three months; his face was drawn, his shoulders stooped and his temples were clearly marked with grey. He did not joke with Ercole, did not tease Mr Cool, did not even kiss Aysha. In the tavern—

where he ordered a fresh glass of whisky every quarter of an hour—he would now sit in a gloomy silence, now order us to do all kinds of ‘queer things. He made Monsieur Delet and Schmidt drink *Brüderschaft* while he laughed unnaturally. Aysha, gentle tender Aysha, had to demonstrate how he would stab Alexey Spiridonovich to death with a table knife. Then the Teacher suggested that we might shoot a stray cat, but this we all resolutely refused to do and Mr Cool declared solemnly that ‘none of us would shed any blood, even that of an animal’. This the Teacher for some reason found terribly amusing, he cried ‘bravo!’, clapped his hands and ordered Alexey Spiridonovich to write Mr Cool’s words down on the wine list. All this completed my confusion and dismay.

Next morning the Teacher and I were walking in a quiet little street in our quarter. A woman was pushing a baby in a pram towards us. The baby was smiling merrily and senselessly, and when the pram drew level with us it stretched out its hands towards the Teacher, enchanted by the shiny knob of his cane. The Teacher stepped back to the wall and began to babble helplessly, as if he were a child himself: ‘I can’t! Grown-ups, all right, but children, why children? Perhaps better not? Drop it! Run, run! A bullet in the head!’ Never, either before or after that day, did I see our stern, unbending Teacher in such a state. Afraid, I cried: ‘Tell me, oh won’t you tell me what the matter is? What is it you want to drop?’ But Jurenito, seeming to recover at once, mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and said to me with his usual perfect calm: ‘It’s simply weakness. Pay no attention. I’m overtired, and then there’s this heat’.

But in the evening, when we were all sitting under the plane trees on the terrace of a lighthearted café, a boy ran past yelling wildly, selling *La Presse*. Mr Cool beckoned to him, wanting to read the racing results, but a moment later he thrust the sheet smelling sharply of printer’s ink at me and boomed: ‘The Austrian Archduke’s been assassinated! What d’you think of that?’ The Teacher asked him to repeat his

words and calmly took the newspaper. For a long time he sat in silence. We had already forgotten the news—which, after all, was a matter of complete indifference to us—and Mr Cool was singing the praises of the mare Irida when the Teacher remarked in a dispassionate voice: 'So there's to be a war'. This seemed to us so laughable, so absurd, that we all started protesting at once. Monsieur Delet expressed the feeling of us all when he declared: 'A war can happen somewhere among the savages, in the Balkans, say, or in Mexico, but not here! You've forgotten, my friend, that this is Europe!' Mr Cool argued that humanity was, after all, too moral to go to war, and that, besides, war was an unprofitable business. Ercole assured us that if they hadn't succeeded in forcing him to get up from the road, what power on earth could make him fight? Alexey Spiridonovich spoke, cloudily as always, about 'the spirit'. Aysha, however, announced that he had heard a lot about war at home in Senegal, and it wasn't a bad thing at all. The Teacher did not argue, but, after sitting with us a while longer, said he felt tired and went home by himself.

As for us, we forgot all about war and stayed long past midnight, chatting about perfectly peaceful matters such as a joint trip to Corsica, the qualities of various cheeses, and Ercole's latest infatuation with a Hungarian woman in a circus who went in for lifting sixty-stone weights. Aysha alone, who had evidently enjoyed the game invented by Jurenito, reminded us of the Teacher's words when we were parting for the night: laughing, shouting and jumping up and down he started to show us once again how well he could stab Alexey Spiridonovich or the shy, quiet Schmidt.

## Stormy parting—I react to the war in a variety of ways

SOON WE UNDERSTOOD that the Teacher was not joking. I shall not describe the days of waiting: they are still too fresh in all our memories. Our feelings between the appearance of one special edition and the next, ranging from hope at any price to dull despair, were shared during those days by a hundred million people of all tongues. The fatal 30th of July came at last. All doubts vanished, everyone understood the irremediable and, abandoning all thought, rushed headlong into the whirlpool.

In the evening, without prior arrangement but all driven by the same impulse, we gathered at Jurenito's to part for a long time, perhaps forever. I was shocked to see Monsieur Delet: he appeared completely unhinged, shouted that he would kill Schmidt if he dared to show himself, sang the *Marseillaise* and insisted that Jurenito should immediately go off to fight for civilisation. But Schmidt did show himself, absolutely calm, even to the point of saying something about it being 28 degrees Centigrade in the shade, and Monsieur Delet did not kill him. Instead, unimaginable things began to happen, and Jurenito's studio was transformed into something between the Austrian *Reichsrat* and an ordinary Russian market when somebody has pinched a pie from a peasant woman's stall. Everyone shouted, cursed, sang and interrupted one another to fling accusations all round. Ercole yelled that war was glorious and that he would fire the biggest gun of all. At whom? We'll see, but fire he would! *Evviva!*

Under the influence of the shouting, Aysha lost his head, snatched up a paper-knife and demanded to be told there and then whose throat he should cut, Mr Cool's or mine. Monsieur



Delet explained to him firmly that he was a French Aysha and must therefore cut Schmidt's throat. Carried away by this prospect Aysha decided to go into action at once, so resolutely that the Teacher wisely locked him up in a small closet.

Alexey Spiridonovich wailed, clutching his head in his hands: 'This is the day of redemption, bright and pure! Russia! Messiah! The cross on St Sophia! Brother Slavs!' He rushed towards Schmidt and, whimpering, embraced the Gefman: 'My foe! My brother! I love you, and just because I love I must kill you! Do you understand? I do not kill, but as I kill I die, sacrificed; we shall defeat Germany! Christ is risen!' And he kissed Schmidt, who pushed him politely out of the way, wiped his face with his handkerchief and tidied his hair with a little comb.

Mr Cool, moved by the whole spectacle, including Aysha, said in a friendly way: 'I'm neutral. But I, too, am beginning to understand that war is neither as immoral nor as unprofitable as we used to think'.

I sat there, utterly crushed by what was happening. Suddenly I realised that all the ghastly symptoms which had pursued me for many years were humdrum, petty and everyday compared with this reality. Aware of this, I ceased to think altogether, ceased to feel or live an individual life, and lost myself for a long, long time.

When, exhausted, they had all quietened down a little, Schmidt said: 'Dear friends, I feel no hatred towards any of you, although you are my enemies. The thing's very simple. We must organise you'. He went up to the map of Europe on the wall and, as it were, cut off with his finger a quarter of France, an eighth of Russia and a few minor countries in between. 'For the time being this is all that's to be directly annexed; the rest will merely be put under systematic pressure. Of course the operation isn't particularly gentlemanly, but there's nothing for it, you'll never organise yourselves of your own free will. And so, *auf Wiedersehen*. I hope to meet you in one of the new provinces of the German Reich.' Saying this,

he shook the Teacher's hand, bowed to us all and left the room.

A dreadful din started up once more. Monsieur Delet released Aysha and insisted that he should run after Schmidt and cut his throat in defence of civilisation. But Aysha, who had calmed down in solitary confinement, preferred to crack walnuts with a Mexican idol on Jurenito's couch.

This time it was the Teacher who restored order. He told us in a kindly way that he could understand us all and was glad to be with his friends at such a time, but unfortunately his train was leaving in an hour and he must soon bid us farewell, possibly for a long while. 'The inevitable, the inexorable has happened. Do not think this is only going on for a week and then it'll be the Royal once again. No, this heat-tormented day is the ultimate end. Look back once more before it is too late. Say goodbye to all you have known in the past. Not a leech, but an opened artery. You think my words are strange, but could you have believed yesterday in what is happening today? What, then, shall I say of tomorrow? Shall I cry the familiar, hallowed, comfortable words "motherland", "honour", "victory", "in the name of", "in the name of"? What's in a name? They are working for a master without a face, without a spirit, unborn yet infinitely cruel in the womb. And you must work for him too. Go where necessity takes you. Threaten, fire, drink wine, weep, do everything you must do. I'm going away, but we shall meet again. When? I do not know. Goodbye, friends.'

Taking a small suitcase, filled mainly with papers, the Teacher went out, asking us not to accompany him to the station. After him all the others left too. I remained alone with Aysha in those rooms which still seemed to retain the Teacher's breath. All night I gazed at his terrible maps, at the stone gods, at the short, burnt-out pipe he had forgotten to take, bearing the imprint of his strong teeth. Aysha, rolled into a little ball at my feet, kept munching the endless nuts, from time to time heaving a long sigh: 'Ai! The master's gone to war! Ai, Aysha!' Outside the window, till the morning, there were songs, paperboys shouting, drums beating, the tramping of soldiers on their way

to the station, and some woman's piercing cry: '*Jean, Jean!*'

The morning came. Alas, daylight did not help me to understand, to realise, to start living somehow, anyhow. There began a long existence resembling the weeks spent by a typhoid fever patient in a hospital bed. All around me I saw the same feverish eyes and heard the same delirious talk which, in the end, became everyday speech. When, today, I survey my past and come to those months, I see a gaping hole. I cannot remember any actions, thoughts or words; I merely stand and wonder how I ever managed to scramble out of it.

My friends went their various ways. Mr Cool, carried away by the promise of grandiose orders, left for New York, promising, however, to come back soon. Monsieur Delet was mobilised and sent somewhere in the South to guard railway bridges. He wrote to me that he had been posted to Avignon to take charge of the military cemetery; in addition, aflame with enthusiasm but unable to fight in view of his age, he took to journalism and published articles in *L'Aube d'Avignon*, and also started various patriotic undertakings. Ercole, remaining without means of support, tried lying down in the middle of a Paris street, but was quickly sent back to Italy. Aysha was called up and, after a short period of training in a southern town, where he was taught how to handle arms other than a table knife, he went off to the front.

Then came Alexey Spiridonovich's turn and mine. We could not return to Russia, and one morning we went together to the Palais des Invalides to sign on as volunteers in the French army. He ran all the way in a state of exaltation, talking about martyrdom and heroism, the sword of Christ and Merezhkovsky, Constantinople and something else. On the way he kept dropping into various bars, having a quick one and trying to embrace the *patron*: 'Allies! Brothers!' I walked in silence, rather subdued, feeling nothing but the unbearable heat and self-annihilation. I went because it was the easiest way out. To put my belly in the way of someone's bayonet or to stick my own bayonet through someone else's belly seemed to me at that

time considerably simpler than to wake in the morning, to pay an honest sou for my newspaper, read about the slitting of bellies and, while reading, order a cup of coffee and a *brioche*.

The square was crowded with thousands of people carrying flags of different countries. They were all singing their national anthems at once, and the sun, the bright scraps flying in the wind and the wild dissonance of voices made one's head reel. We found the Russians: they were already making war on each other, waving all kinds of flags—Russian tricolors, flags that were just red, flags that were red with inscriptions to explain their redness, French flags, and finally flags that were quite incomprehensible and complicated in their design. Following the example of the others, they also tried to sing, but as soon as they started up any song it was drowned at once in a roar of protest. Then they stopped arguing and began simultaneously to perform *God Save the Tsar*, the *Marseillaise*, the *Internationale*, *From a Far-Off Country* and even *Do not scold me*. The impression this produced was a strong one, reminiscent of Negro music, and perfectly in harmony with the general confusion, heat and discord of this crowd of many races.

Soon, however, this horror was replaced by a peaceful scene in the public baths. Holding up my pants I went to try my luck at a certain reception point, where various heroic bodies were being measured, prodded and banged with little hammers. A doctor put his stethoscope against my ribs, barked quickly 'No good! Next one!' and I was left with my heroism, free to put my shirt on in a corner and go away to read *Le Matin* and eat sweet rolls. I bade a touching farewell to Alexey Spiridonovich, who was sent off next morning with his Saint Sophia and a group of suspicious-looking Spaniards for training in Touraine. At the station he suddenly announced that Jurenito was a traitor, for he was a 'neutral at heart, and all neutrals are concealed Germanophiles'. He also asked me to return to him the old rules of the 'Society for the Search of Man' and the wine list of the Royal on which he had noted down Mr Cool's memorable aphorism.

But, alas, Jurenito had disappeared without trace. He had not left anyone his address and no one received any letters from him. The studio stood empty, and no one came to tidy away the crumpled newspapers or shut the open trunk. At first I went there often to abandon myself to sweet memories of the many evenings spent in that depressing, abandoned barn. But I was forced to stop these visits owing to a number of unpleasant events. Paris at that time was in the grip of an epidemic of spy-mania. German agents were discovered in cafés, in offices, in kindergartens, and even in people's own homes—usually in their wives' wardrobes. Professors of gynaecology, wet-nurses, cemetery keepers, one's own cousins and many others were suddenly revealed as traitors. When, finally, a map of the two hemispheres, scribbled all over in pencil, was found at the house of an elderly teacher of geography, and a second-hand compass of German origin among the wares of a junk-shop keeper at the *Marché aux Puces*, suspicion reached its highest peak. The concierge who harboured a dislike of Jurenito—or rather, not of him but of Ercole, who had treated her staircase with insufficient respect—reported to someone that the Teacher had led a questionable life, the people who had come to see him had been odd and obviously without a situation, and they had all talked together in a foreign language, probably German. After this the police arrived, and although there were no serious consequences—for the denunciation was childish and nonsensical—I was forced to leave the dear, deserted temple.

That autumn and winter I waited passionately for the Teacher. In the street I would look back over my shoulder, in my room I would listen for footsteps on the staircase and lie in wait for the postman. Where was he? At the front, perhaps commanding a division? Arrested? In prison? Drowned while crossing the ocean on his way home? Shot? Killed in action? Why, then, had he abandoned us to burn in this eternal fire? Why, then, was I alive? I protested, I demanded, I waited, but no answer came.

I can see them now, those stormy nights when my flimsy,

of parchment with red seals, which turned out to be diplomatic passports and frightened me so much that I covered my head with the blanket. But all the same I did not dare to argue and only pointed at my trousers. Jurenito said: 'That's not so terrible, we'll drive to a tailor's at once and then to the shops. What's much worse is that you want to talk about what you've been through. If you can't stop suffering altogether, at least try to keep quiet. I'll do all the talking and if anyone asks you anything say something innocuous, like "*merci*".'

Next day we drove up to the palace which housed the Ministry. In the appointments book, between a Mr Wild—an American shipowner—and representatives of the Portuguese press I read 'Labardan Mission'. Trembling, I gazed at the flunkies in their raspberry-red tail-coats and said *merci* to the most important-looking one out of sheer embarrassment, for really there was no need. The Minister, on the other hand, turned out to be not at all frightening but very amiable indeed. The Teacher told him solemnly that Labardan wished to join the Allies and therefore requested him to give a precise formulation of their aims.

'Our aims are known to the entire world,' said the Minister. 'We are fighting for the rights of all, even of the small nations, to determine their own future; we are fighting for democracy and freedom.' The Teacher was visibly moved by this declaration and did not conceal his enthusiasm. I, however, had already read about this in the newspapers, and I attributed the Teacher's excitement to the fact that he had read no papers on his island, or else to the special diplomatic reception we had been given. I modestly said '*merci*' and we bowed ourselves out.

In the evening the Teacher drew up a suitable statement and ordered me to send it to the world's most important newspapers. Here is the text:

'The Government of the Republic of Labardan cannot remain neutral in the great struggle between barbarism and civilisation. Conversations with representatives of the Allied Powers have finally convinced the Labardan Government of the high aims

of the defenders of the right. All nations, even the smallest, will be granted the freedom to dispose of their own destinies. The Poles, the Alsations, the Georgians, the Finns, the Irish, the Egyptians, the Indians and dozens of other nations will be liberated from the yoke. Oppression of peoples of other races will cease; there will be no more colonies. Finally, after the Allied victory, freedom will be established in despotic Russia. The Government and people of Labardan cannot hesitate any longer. They proudly join the ranks of fighters for the true cause.'

But not a single French newspaper published our declaration. All of them confined themselves to a brief note to the effect that Labardan had broken off relations with Germany. The telegrams sent to the foreign press were returned marked 'stopped by military censorship'. To round it off, various ranks from the Prefecture called repeatedly at the hotel where we were staying and showed an interest in us which was obviously inspired by something more than the desire to show goodwill to representatives of a friendly Power. I asked the Teacher why a rational interpretation of the Minister's word had led to such unpleasant results, but he advised me not to weary myself with abstract questions but, instead, to fetch him all the Paris papers. An hour later a heap of articles and reports marked with red pencil lay on his desk, e.g. 'Constantinople for Russia', 'The German colonies and the Japanese', 'The Rhine—a French river', 'Italy's historical rights to Dalmatia', and so forth. The Teacher said to me:

'It's my own fault. I was guilty of unpardonable vulgarity in taking the Minister's lofty imagery literally, like a simpleton. Once, in America, I did look through the "Brief Manual for Beginners in Diplomacy", but I was studying electromagnetics, Persian and shorthand at the time, so that I must have been preoccupied and did not absorb even the rudiments of the trade. There's nothing for it, we must hurry up and rectify our mistake. Off to the Ministry!'

This time we were not received by the Minister but by an official—judging by his extremely self-important mien, not a

very high one. Politely yet firmly Jurenito stated the conditions on which Labardan could join the Allies:

- (1) A watchmaker, a citizen of Labardan, had, as proved by historians, resided in the town of Nuremberg in the 17th century. Nuremberg with all the adjacent territories, including Munich, must therefore pass under Labardan control.
- (2) The vital interests of Labardan demanded colonies. The place most suitable for colonisation was Hamburg.
- (3) Although Labardan had no common frontier with Germany, the threat of a new war would endanger it unless certain strategic changes were introduced into the map of Europe. The cession of Smyrna, the Prater in Vienna and Baden-Baden would ensure the national security of Labardan.

The official heard this with attention, suggested that we should visit the front with other guests of honour in the meantime, made us a present of a dozen postcards with views of localities destroyed by the Germans, and promised to keep the Minister informed of further developments.

The next day we left for the front in the company of a manufacturer from Barcelona, a Peruvian journalist and a very polite lieutenant. This lieutenant spent a long time choosing a part of the front where there would be nothing resembling war. But we never got even as far as that. As soon as the Peruvian heard the distant rumbling of guns he began to complain of strong stabbing pains in his stomach, said that he was fully satisfied with the tour and was now in a hurry to get back and send a cable to his paper. We had two cars, and the Peruvian drove back in one of them. The manufacturer, on the other hand, was very brave and kept explaining to the lieutenant that if the Spanish had been in the place of the French, Berlin would have been taken long ago. After driving a little further we lunched with a most charming general. Then we had tea with another general, and dined with a third. Everywhere toasts were drunk, including one to 'Labardan, our new friend'. The next day we moved a little further in the direction of the front and, at last, saw a battery of guns. Hearing that this spot



was within range of heavy shells, the manufacturer changed his tune at once, demanded a helmet, gave me his family's address and absolutely refused to drive any further. He did not even get out of the car, and the lieutenant tried in vain to distract him with talk of the superiority of French firing over German. 'But the Germans fire too, don't they?' moaned the Spaniard, and called for a sheet of paper to write a last letter to his wife.

We walked away a little. Everything was quiet, and very peaceful. The Teacher got into conversation with the officer commanding the battery, who suggested that they might start firing in order to acquaint us with the process of an artillery duel. Normally it began two hours later. The huge, long-necked monsters stood in a row. Tiny gnomes fussed round them, bringing up shells, pulling ropes, running clear. The monsters bowed down, spat something black high into the air—it was visible only for a split second—and fell back, exhausted. In reply there was the roar of an express train rushing into the glass hall of a main line station. That was a German shell.

The Teacher looked long and respectfully at the enraged monster, blazing, filled with fire and will-power. 'You may laugh at God and poetry, at freedom and the motherland,' he said to me, 'but you must bow down in reverence before a gun. Not only the death of a hundred men or more, but also the black, inescapable future comes flying out of its mouth.' Then he added: 'And by the way, talking of freedom, have you noticed how they've all forgotten about it, except perhaps the professional journalists? Just as these men have subordinated their feelings, thoughts and days to the wise machines, so the whole of Europe is today under the rule of a single iron law. Freedom—simple freedom, not the solemn one that you find in the constitutions, "freedom of speech, conscience, movement" etc. etc., no, freedom to live, to think about taking a boat out on the lake, to swot flies with a towel, to write verse, to hang yourself with a necktie for love—this human freedom has been forgotten by everyone. It has become an anachronism. A splendid development! It never existed anyway, that freedom,

there was only a counterfeit, a doll, a toy. It couldn't exist as long as the lie was there. Of course the war has already killed hundreds of thousands of people, but it has also, with a single iron breath—with a shell spat out like this one—destroyed the vile waxen beauty in the shopwindow, freedom in corsets and a playful *décolletage*, no lower, of course, than the prescribed number of inches.'

At that moment we heard the heartrending cry of the Spaniard, who had gone through all the torments of the anticipation of death and had now reached the stage of the death-rattle. There was nothing to be done. We turned back towards Paris.

At home disagreeable news awaited us. It turned out that the telegram containing our declaration as well as the proud demands for the annexation of various territories had landed at the police Prefecture instead of going to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, an outstanding geographer—a member of the Academy—after carrying out the necessary investigations had reached the conclusion, which astonished him and us alike, that the State of Labardan did not exist. There was an island called Labrador and there was Lapland, but neither was a republic. His report was published in the Sunday edition of *Figaro* and also reached the Prefecture, owing, no doubt, to the French nation's universally recognised love of geography.

A policeman called on Jurenito and began a conversation which, judging by its clear-cut nature and the impossibility of an ambiguous interpretation, was by no means diplomatic. He said something unpleasant to me as well, but I, remembering the paper with the red seal which was still in existence and the Teacher's instructions, let drop for the last time my diplomat's '*merci*'. The position was obviously very bad indeed but, thanks to the Teacher's resourcefulness and tact, it all ended with a few awkward minutes and a friendly deputy's visiting card.

## CHAPTER XV    The 'champion' of civilisation' and Aysha's necklace

JULIO JURENITO soon won universal respect by his warm sympathy for the Allied cause, his eloquence and his organising ability. He was better than anyone at arranging patriotic *matinées*, bazaars and concerts. The lovely Vicomtesse de Bouran, after getting 100 francs for a carnation 'to provide sensible entertainment for our poor *poilus*', went on for a long time arousing the jealousy and envy of her friends with tales about the amazing Mexican. He helped to open a *tir à pigeons* of hitherto undreamt-of dimensions, where ladies inspired by a sacred enthusiasm and young men of good society suffering from incurable heart trouble were able to fire, if not at the bloodthirsty *boche*, then at least at well-fattened pigeons which had forgotten how to fly. The entrance money went to the wounded warriors. Nor did Jurenito forget the unhappy refugees: for them, he organised an exclusive fancy-dress ball at the house of the Marquise de Gibier. The salon was transformed into a battlefield by the efforts of Gaparanda, a fashionable painter; the guests were dressed as soldiers, baggy-trouseréd zouaves, turbaned Indians, sailors and nurses. Plain army rum was served by Senegalese waiters in glasses shaped like grenades. The champagne was chilled in buckets which reminded you of artillery shells. Intimate nooks and corners were fenced off with barbed wire. Rockets were let off incessantly in the garden. The net takings for the benefit of the refugees amounted to eighty francs. Jurenito, the guiding spirit and faithful lieutenant of ladies unable to bear social inactivity, was instrumental in setting up many useful institutions: in one of them—'Home from Home'—female inhabitants of villages destroyed by the war were given a clean bunk and a nourishing supper consisting of soup and boiled millet for a mere ten hours or so of unskilled work; in another—'The Sugar Lump'

—all babies whose fathers had been wounded not less than three times were given a lump of sugar once a week entirely free of charge.

Best of all, however, Jurenito liked to organise deputations to all kinds of monuments. There were glorious pilgrimages to all the equestrian and pedestrian statues in the Paris squares. Soon dissatisfied with Paris, he took to touring the provinces. In that way he honoured fourteen 'Republics', nine 'Liberties', four Gambettas, eleven Joans of Arc, Marshal Ney, several abbés who had discovered quinine, an unknown nude woman (possibly another 'Liberty'), Alfred de Musset and a bronze soldier at Poitiers. During those months the Teacher's outward appearance became known throughout the civilised world, for daily, in thousands of cinemas, after the baby which reconciled an erring couple or the sapphire robbery in Hindustan solved by an intrepid detective, there would appear on the screen a tall gentleman in a state of visible emotion and to the rhythmic strains of the *Marseillaise* deposit a large beribboned wreath at the feet of yet another monument.

The last of these demonstrations was the most successful. It happened at the beginning of October. The Teacher prowled through Paris in dejection, looking in vain for just one more statue that he had not used. 2,806 pilgrims had exhausted the resources of the Capital of the World. He even began thinking about taking trips abroad, where virgin soil awaited him: whole fleets of British admirals with unpronounceable names, Vittorio-Emanuele and the rest of them, Skobelev, anything you like and in any quantity. But once, quite unexpectedly, walking through a narrow street in Mouton-Duvernay, the Teacher started and came to a halt. Before him in a dirty courtyard, next to a workshop manufacturing zinc bathtubs, stood a statue—damaged if you will, dusty and bereft of its pedestal, but a real undiscovered statue for all that. It represented a person of male sex holding something like a book in one hand and the remains of a pair of scales in the other.

There followed a serious scientific investigation. An abbé

who was an archaeologist and worked on the staff of *La Croix* declared that this was the Archangel Michael weighing the sins of France and announcing her salvation. On the subject of the archangel's costume (he was dressed in a frock-coat) he delivered a special lecture entitled 'Religious presentiments and clairvoyance of our great medieval artists'. Another archaeologist simply asserted that this was an ancient Gaul and that the objects in his hands were not a book and a pair of scales but an archer's bow and a bearskin. The statue, he claimed, was of very early origin, and the frock-coat had been added during the Restoration in the middle of the last century.

An entirely different opinion was maintained by the concierge of the house in whose courtyard the statue was discovered. According to her vulgar and ignorant fancy, this statue had been commissioned some ten years previously from Monsieur Becque, a monumental mason, by the widow of Monsieur Crabe, the owner of a large colonial goods shop in the rue Froideveau. At the widow's request the mason had represented the shopkeeper with his beloved scales and his accounts ledger. But when the statue was finished, the frivolous widow had suddenly married the manager of a travelling circus, gone off with him and never collected the statue. Monsieur Becque had abandoned his workshop four years ago (the same workshop where they were now making zinc bathtubs) without paying the concierge, but leaving her instead the statue of Monsieur Crabe and an old bald-headed tomcat. Such was the version of the concierge, worthy to be recorded for its puerile ignorance.

But the Teacher was not satisfied either with the findings of the two archaeologists. He advanced his own hypothesis, which defeated all the others. The statue was a champion of civilisation, holding a 'declaration of human and civil rights' and the balance, symbol of eternal justice. Having thus determined the identity of the figure, Julio Jurenito announced that a solemn pilgrimage to the statue of the 'champion of civilisation' would take place on October 28th. Invitations were sent to many scientific societies and sports clubs, as well as to

academic delegations of the Allied and neutral countries.

The day was very fine, sunny and warm. The entire courtyard was filled with important people. The concierge, at last, was shamed into silence. Every face bore a look of concentration. The Academy of Sciences, the 'Circle of Young Swimmers across the Seine', the military attaché of Montenegro, the 'Society of Patriots Outside the Call-up Age', actresses from the *Sans-Préjudice* theatre and others made speeches and laid wreaths. The concierge's own words were unexpected and touching: 'Forgive me, Monsieur Crabe, or rather Champion of Civilisation! I used to see you every day behind your counter and here, in my own courtyard. But I did not know that your scales were the symbol of justice, nor did I ever glance into your big book on the tall desk. Now that so many fine gentlemen have come to visit you, I understand it all. Receive my modest gift!' And she threw a few freshly-picked asters at the statue's feet.

Jurenito was the last to speak. I was surprised to see him for the first time without a wreath on such an occasion. How could this have happened? Hadn't the Teacher planned all the week for the festive day? He spoke with expression and profound feeling, as follows: 'Dear Champion of Civilisation! After so many beautiful speeches I shall not recall your heroic actions of the past. In these tragic days your image shines like a beacon for the entire world. Here, in this lowly courtyard, a never-to-be-extinguished lighthouse burns in the night of the universe. You drew up the divine declaration, and in order that your written words should not remain a dead letter you dispassionately took up your balance to weigh every man's rights according to merit. But now the savage barbarians, those Goths, those modern Attilas, cannibals, despots, have raised their threatening arms against civilisation, against the sacred rights of citizen and man. You have not yielded. Rallying other, younger nations round you, you have hoisted the banner of struggle in the cause of humanity, mankind, protection of the weak. I have not brought you any flowers. What flower is worthy

of lying at your feet? Not these flowers, surely, grown in peaceful hothouses and gardens, but only those plucked on the field of battle. I am certain that one of the millions of our heroes will bring you the highest gift—his victorious trophies wrested from the vanquished barbarians!’

The Teacher did not finish his inspired speech. Pushing aside the crowd, and even throwing an all too venerable academicians off his feet, a Negro in army uniform came running towards Jurenito, his right sleeve dangling empty. It is hard to convey my astonishment and joy when I recognised him: it was our dear little Aysha! Meanwhile he was kissing the Teacher’s hands and waistcoat. When he had finished kissing and recovered his breath, he began to speak:

‘Master! Good master! Aysha find you! You speak well, and your god a good god.

‘If Aysha still have his arm, Aysha make a god like that too, but Aysha’s arm gone. Aysha in the war. Oh, terrible! At first Aysha silly. The corporal, very good gentleman, want to kill Aysha. Aysha very frightened. The guns go hoo-hoo-hoo! Then Aysha jump out, throw down rifle, take knife, shout and run. Remember, Master, you ask Aysha how he stab with knife? Aysha run, see a German, two, five, ten, many Germans, Aysha cut off all heads. Then a Frenchman catch five Germans, not know what to do with them, silly Frenchman. He say to Aysha, take them to general. Aysha not silly. Good corporal teach Aysha, Germans enemies, you must kill Germans. Aysha kill five more with knife. Then the guns again, boum-boum! Aysha understand. Angry god, clever god, Aysha must save himself, put “gri-gri” on heart. Aysha pull out teeth of all dead Germans, make “gri-gri”, put on heart. Then ball from gun fall straight on Aysha, bad ball. “Gri-gri” on Aysha’s heart, Aysha not die, only cut off arm. It hurt, Master! Aysha always wear “gri-gri” now! Aysha love “gri-gri”. Master says this is good god. Master not know what to give his god. Aysha love Master! Aysha give away “gri-gri”!’

Aysha took out of his pocket a large necklace made of yellowed

human teeth, skilfully bored through and strung on a light-blue thread. The Teacher,<sup>1</sup> turning towards the statue, declared solemnly: 'Great Champion, I give you your brother's heroic gift—the gift of a modest, nameless fighter in the sacred cause of world civilisation. I place this naïve and beautiful gift in the balance, poised today at the turning point of history. May its weight equal that of love, sacrifice and humanity!'

It was an unforgettable moment. Many were sobbing, even men, even the military attaché of Montenegro.

The next day descriptions of the ceremony and of Aysha's gift were published in all the reputable newspapers, and a week later, Aysha, who had once again installed himself in the Teacher's flat, received a telegram informing him that the University of Lisbon, impressed by his selfless heroism in the defence of civilisation, had decided to grant him a doctor's degree *honoris causa*. But Aysha, far from having his head turned by all these honours, merely went on, grinning, to beg the Teacher for money to buy chocolate creams. He was very distressed about his empty sleeve. Then Jurenito bought him a special artificial arm made by an American firm called Ultima. Aysha was very proud of his new arm and even used to say that if it didn't hurt so much he would cut off his other, real arm just to get another Ultima. The only thing he could not do with his Ultima was to make new gods. The Teacher advised him to follow his example instead and go to see other gods, i.e. various Paris statues, which Aysha thenceforth began to do with great zeal. His interpretation of these gods was personal and highly unexpected: the Republic was, in his opinion, a goddess of fertility—'in belly is baby, in breast is milk'; Liberty was a goddess of dancing—'lots of fun, goes flying chop-chop', Danton—'good god, cut off head, very satisfied', but Rodin's *Thinker* was 'bad god, sitting down with stomach-ache', and so forth. However, he visited them all frequently and without distinction, bringing them buttons, old feathers, and even chocolate tinfoil, which he himself adored.

Sometimes, in the evenings, during those years of colossal



disaster, sitting in the cosy dining-room at the round table under the lamp with the Teacher and Aysha, I would forget all I had been through and feel myself one of a close-knit, tender, inseparable family.

## CHAPTER XVI <sup>1</sup> Mr Cool's economic empire

DISSATISFIED with ideological and philanthropic activity, the Teacher decided to turn to practical work. First of all he resumed his chemical investigations, seeking with exceptional patience and persistence new and hitherto untried methods of killing human beings. The asphyxiating gases and liquid flame pumps of which he had written in 1913 now looked like childish toys. He pinned all his hopes on certain radiation effects of electric waves and radium. The viscountesses and marchionesses were forgotten; he did not leave his study for days on end. He complained to me of the shortage of funds: he was a mere 300,000 dollars short to buy the amount of metal needed for his experiments. Still greater difficulties were occasioned by the lack of subjects for tests, since neither rabbits nor dogs would do instead of human beings for the purpose. Jurenito approached the authorities with a request for a few prisoners of war for his important experiments, but this was refused out of prejudice.

One day the Teacher came to me looking gay and animated: despite all difficulties he had found a method which would considerably ease and expedite the destruction of mankind. He explained the rudiments of his invention to me but, by reason of my innate stupidity in all things connected with physics and mathematics, I didn't take any of it in, except the fact that it was possible, by means of some sort of light-waves, to kill no less than fifty thousand people along a 100-mile front. 'If only Mr Cool were here, he'd help me to put my invention into practice!' the Teacher cried sorrowfully, realising that neither I nor Aysha could furnish him with the funds required to make the complicated apparatus. After the refusal he had met with he no longer wished to make a direct approach to the authorities.

We looked for Mr Cool in the churches, the brothels and the clubs. We asked for him at the Bible Society and in various banks, but no one knew his address. Once, almost without hope

after a long and futile search, we were sitting in a little bar near the Gare du Nord drinking bad wine when a young soldier just arrived from the front joined us. He had been on a sector adjacent to the British and had many amusing things to say about them.

'How clean they are, and how foolish! In the first place, they wash every day; and not only their faces, but their whole bodies. What d'you say to that? Then they go to church, and there they sing as cheerfully as if they were in an *estaminet*. Then there are some who don't wear trousers but only skirts. I used to think that underneath, at least, they'd have pants. I even had an argument about it with an English general's kitchen-maid. Well, she looked when the general's batman was walking upstairs. Nothing! Now what d'you say? And then, as soon as they arrive, the first thing they ask for is French wine. One of them was given some vinegar, and he drank it off without batting an eyelid: "Yes!" And when they're going home they all go to the *parfumeries* to buy scent for their wives. At Amiens there's a queue all day long. You wouldn't believe what they'll buy—insect-killer for perfume, fretwork tools for a manicure set. "It's French", they say. Funny chaps. Another thing, the English airmen drop arrows and on them there's writing—hymns, I suppose. Have a look—I'm taking one home for my little boy.'

The soldier showed us an arrow on which was written in English: 'Brother, enter into the Kingdom of Heaven'. Seeing this, the Teacher in great excitement cried: 'That's Mr Cool! I know it!' and ran off to the British consulate to get our passports stamped.

During the next few weeks we tried to trace Mr Cool through the Ministry of War and various supply departments. I couldn't say that this occupation was to our liking. We were suspected of being German spies, arrested, and closely interrogated. We were asked what Jurenito's uncle, who lived in Mexico, had done in 1898 and whether my cousin in Novgorod-Seversk owned any landed property. Then they made us open our mouths wide

and looked inside for something other than teeth and a tongue; washed us with a stinking liquid which was supposed to bring out secret writing on our skin; and finally, after an energetic intervention by the Mexican ambassador, they released us. To make up for it, on the day of our arrest we discovered the address of the factory in Missouri where the arrows were made.

We sent a cable at once. The Teacher was so certain that our friend had something to do with the arrows that he addressed the cable directly to his name. No reply came and we decided to go to America. Two hours before our ship was due to sail the Teacher received a telegram from Calais: 'Waiting Hotel Britannic Cool'.

We found Mr Cool up to his ears in work. He greeted us with a cry of 'Hi!' and an energetic movement of the foot which rested on his desk, and asked our permission to conclude his most urgent business. We sat down and listened to his conversations with various callers and over the telephone, but I still could not make out precisely what our enterprising American was doing. I learned, however, that sheep in Australia were suffering from an infectious disease, that Bournonville cars had 108 component parts, that Spanish girls had exceptional endurance, that tear-gas was cheap to produce and a number of other useful things.

Having dismissed the last caller—who, for some reason, had brought a huge round cheese with him—Mr Cool engaged in friendly conversation with us. First of all, pointing towards the East, he said in a peaceful, almost patriarchal tone: 'I've got a lot of ground to cover these days. It's almost too much for me. Oh, my friends, what a great thing is war! It is restoring Europe's health!' Then he initiated us into the various branches of his amazing economic empire. He supplied everything the five continents could produce. Dozens of ships were unloaded daily in Calais, in Dieppe, in Boulogne. Frozen sheeps' carcasses were brought from Australia, shells and motor cars from America, coffee from Brazil, rice from China, squat donkeys from North Africa. Apart from these official supplies, he also

engaged in private enterprise, first and foremost in his favourite field: a large-scale network of brothels in all the towns in the rear of the fighting. Local forces being insufficient for the purpose, he imported women from Ireland, Spain and the South of France. Then he had opened a factory making cheap wreaths out of beads decorated with national insignia. Finally, not forgetting his basic, profoundly moral goal, he had organised a number of mobile church huts, which could be adapted for showing films and dispensing tea to soldiers. He also printed and distributed vast numbers of copies of Bible commentaries, and had even managed, owing to the absent-mindedness of Headquarters, to put his encouraging inscription on those arrows, although they formed part of an army contract.

Mr Cool ended his story with words of deeply-felt optimism: 'War is improving mankind. Never have the dollar and the word of God been so closely linked as they are today. Therein lies the promise of redemption!'

The next day Mr Cool decided to show us something of his 'economic empire'. We obtained the necessary passes and drove off in a car in the direction of St Paul. An endless procession of lorries loaded with Mr Cool's gifts was crawling along the straight highway—with shells, carcasses, machine-guns, condensed milk, lint, poison-gas containers, and also those for whom all this was intended: namely, soldiers freshly arrived from England. In the other direction came empty lorries; in a few of them lay those who had already done their bit, bandaged and immobile. Soldiers with flags controlled the traffic at the intersections. It was just like Piccadilly. Everything had the simplicity of genius. The carcasses were cooked. The soldiers ate the soup. The shells were brought up to the guns. Then, at the appointed moment, the guns were fired, the soldiers came out of the trenches and occupied an area of a hundred square yards. After this some were buried, others bandaged and laid in lorries, while yet others had some more soup. A report was sent off to Headquarters. At Headquarters they drew up a communiqué and sent fresh orders. More soldiers, sheep's carcasses,

shells etc. were brought up. So it went on, day after day, month after month, year after year, and Mr Cool, conscious of his service to the common cause, had every reason to feel proud.

Then we went back towards Rouen and saw some of our friend's other achievements. We were struck by the practical nature and the beauty of his wreaths at the vast cemeteries, with their graves set in serried rows. In a small town where British, French and Belgian troops were quartered we admired a marvellous brothel with a tremendous turnover capacity, where different days were set aside for different nationalities. Perfect order reigned. And our hearts were deeply touched by the religious sermons of Mr Cool's colleagues addressed to soldiers as they peacefully wiped their bayonets on the grass, their day's work done. Here is what they said: 'Brothers! You know the commandment: thou shalt not kill. Killing is forbidden, they send you to prison for it. But it is the duty of every Christian to defend his country and obey his commanders. Brothers! Be patriotic, annihilate the Teutons, the faithless foes of Christ. And keep off drink'. All this was profoundly moving and reminded me of the long-past visions of poor Francis as he spoke to the villagers of Umbria.

After thanking Mr Cool for the pleasure he had given us, Jurenito told him about his invention and his hopes. To my surprise, Mr Cool, far from welcoming the Teacher's brilliant discovery, was actually put out by it.

'I beg of you, my dear fellow,' he said to Jurenito, 'do not tell anyone about your invention for the time being. If killing becomes so simple and easy, the war will end in a couple of weeks and my economic empire will collapse. My own country is only just getting ready to fight. Let's keep your idea as a last resort. I'll give you the means of making your apparatus if you'll promise me not to use it for the present.'

Having reflected a little, the Teacher agreed. The things he had seen during the past few days, he said, certainly deserved development and promotion. I know that shortly afterwards he made his apparatus and left it with Mr Cool. When, a year

later, he wanted to use it after all, Mr Cool procrastinated, saying that he had transferred it to the United States and could not trust anyone to bring it back, and so forth. I took it that Mr Cool was moved by financial considerations, but on one occasion he remarked that the Germans could be finished off with French bayonets, whilst Jurenito's magic would be better left for the Japanese. The course of future events was such that the Teacher never mentioned his invention again; but, be that as it may, I know for certain that the apparatus and the explanatory texts are in the hands of Mr Cool.

When he had wrung the promise he wanted from Jurenito, Mr Cool cheered up again, gave an attentive hearing to various improvements proposed by the Teacher in the military sphere—new gases, fast tanks, etc.—and suggested that Jurenito should henceforth work with him on expanding and modernising the business. The Teacher expressed his full agreement. Then the question of what to do with me and Aysha came up. Neither of us understood anything about military technique and we had no organising ability whatever.

In the end it was decided that Aysha should take up selling the beadwork wreaths; Mr Cool thought that his artificial arm, his medal, black skin and resounding title of Doctor *honoris causa* of Lisbon University would be a great asset in marketing these patriotic objects. As for me, I was offered a post as cashier in one of Mr Cool's brothels at Amiens.

Three days later I was sitting behind a little table in the entrance hall of a fair-sized detached house, handing out—according to price—tickets by the hour or the night, as well as an instructive leaflet *God is Love*. I sat there all the evening and all night, watching the impatient gestures of those who came in and the yawns of those who went out. From the adjacent rooms I heard snatches of military marches, laughter, sometimes curses and groans. Sometimes a woman would give a piercing scream. Once a soldier who had had one over the eight started shooting at a portrait of the Queen of the Netherlands which hung, unaccountably, in one of the rooms.

Generally, however, it was pretty quiet. Sometimes I would meet the women; they found the work tiring, but were satisfied with the conditions. Many of them fell ill and were taken away and replaced by new ones. I would wake at about six in the evening, have a meal, skim through the papers and set off to work. There, staring dully at the soldiers going by, I would tear off tickets and in the intervals write bits of my book, *Poems on the Eve*, which was later favourably reviewed by many reputable critics, including V. Y. Bryusov. A month later, however, I could no longer write poems and had developed a total indifference to everything. On one occasion the Teacher came to see me. I emerged from my stupor and began complaining of the boredom, the stench, the beastly piano-playing, the drunken hiccups of the clients. 'I can't go on like this any longer! What's it all for?' I cried.

'My friend, remember how, at the peaceful Rotonde among the models got up in fancy dress, you used to dream about a bomb, a tiny bomb to destroy it all? Now you're working in the enormous factory where thousands of bombs are made daily for the destruction of millions of people.'

I did not argue, but only gave a piteous sob and tore out a ticket for the latest arrival.



## Senegal the blessed— different interpretations of the French word 'poire'

TODAY IT SEEMS to me that if the Teacher had not come to Amiens at the beginning of 1916 and rescued me I should have gone quietly out of my mind. When he turned up at the establishment where I was working, my indifference to the whole world was already so great that I handed him a ticket without looking up. In reply the Teacher said in a commanding tone: 'Get dressed and hand the cash box over to the manager. We're going to Paris'.

In the car I found Mr Cool and Aysha. It appeared that all were tired out by strenuous work and needed a prolonged rest. Where? In San Remo? In Biarritz? In Seville? Aysha suggested: 'Come with me to Senegal'. We found the idea both amusing and attractive. Besides, Mr Cool wouldn't be wasting his time there: export of human raw material, etc. It was decided. Brest. The steamship *Providence*. The sun. Aysha jumped for joy. Aysha was happy, he was going home, he would be able to show off all his things—his Ultima arm, Mr Cool, his diploma with its seal, the chocolate piglets he was taking home as presents.

It is hard to convey the full sweetness of deep and complete rest, blissful dozing in the shade of a simple hut, the pleasant coolness of the river which seemed to be washing me clean of the dust, smoke and filth of my native Europe. Once upon a time I was young and frisky, I was in love, I went to meet my love with a posy in my hands, I wrote verse, I flushed with delight when some provincial hack penned words of encouragement: 'Not too bad; a poet by the grace of God'—in short, I experienced pleasure. But only for five weeks in my whole life have I been simply and completely happy, those five weeks long ago, on the banks of the broad Senegal river.

I forgot it all—war, art, my relatives and friends left in the North. I am convinced that, had there been policemen in the Negro villages and had one of them come running to inquire into my identity, I would have grunted incoherently in reply or slapped him amicably on the belly instead of saying anything at all, or else run away to hide myself under the piles of dried rushes, for I no longer remembered my own name. I never left Aysha's side; together with him I bathed, drank sheep's milk, ate fresh figs and greasy, half-cooked biscuits, and when he began to say his prayers in the *banga*, i.e. the gods' menagerie near the hut, I would also crawl on my belly before the enchanting idols made of wood, birds' feathers, shells and fish-scales and wail 'oo-hoo-hoo' as he did. Aysha quickly abandoned his European costume, retaining only his white piqué waistcoat; he was very picturesque in that get-up with his gleaming artificial arm. True, he would sometimes exchange a few words with his fellow tribesmen, which I could not do. But I did not envy him and was not sad; here, I understood more without words than during the most intimate heart-to-heart talks with white men.

I asked the Teacher whether it would not be better if we followed Aysha's example, left off our trousers and remained for ever in that promised land. But the Teacher replied: 'It is unworthy of man to look back. Childhood is a happy time, but what would you say of a mature man who snatched the rattle from a baby's hands in order to play with it himself? Never say of those who have not yet passed through the ages of corruption that they are happy, but rather pity them. Aysha will don his trousers again. Not thunder will sweep across this country, but the rattle of the motor-cycle, the machine-gun and the typewriter. Enlightenment will come to our simple-hearted friends, and they will set up Mr Cool's brotkeles and Monsieur Delet's hierarchic cemeteries where the charming *bangas* stand today. And we who are now resting in this prehistoric Trouville will be called in to help them. Another lost paradise. But it's only the first step that counts; it isn't as if we weren't used to it'.

I started to protest—why should we help them? Surely we ought to resist, etc. But the Teacher said that we had come to rest and not to argue, that I wasn't looking at all well, and wouldn't it be nice to go and bathe?

Mr Cool caused us a certain amount of worry. At the beginning, in the villages of the coastal strip, he enjoyed himself greatly. But the further we travelled up the river in the direction of Aysha's home, the more often he would express astonishment and even indignation at the local customs. He said that Africa was even worse than Europe. His dollars did not make the least impression on the Negroes, and not one of them had heard of the Bible. Finally Mr Cool, feeling insulted, demanded that we should go back at once. But Aysha, very anxious to visit his home, pacified Mr Cool to some extent by explaining that instead of bits of paper with pictures of American presidents on them they had special shells, and instead of the Bible they had marabout amulets. Though willing to overlook such lack of culture, Mr Cool was constantly pulled up short by things he could not comprehend. The Teacher received from one of the local chiefs a bow carved in ivory, which Mr Cool valued at three dollars despite the crudeness of the work, yet no shells were given in exchange. Aysha, too, would go behind the palm trees entirely free of charge with black women who yet were not his lawful wives.

'What shocking disorder!' Mr Cool would cry. 'I see only now how well-run Europe really is. Colossal energy is needed to bring even a little enlightenment to this country.'

Since energy was a thing Mr Cool always had in excess, he got down to work at once. Having drummed together the inhabitants of the nearest village called Shango, he explained to them with Aysha's help that the chief object of their worship should be dollars, i.e. gold, i.e. shells. But a terrible trial awaited the tireless preacher. The Negroes turned out to be followers of the Borra religion which teaches that the human body is sometimes entered by evil spirits which must be exorcised by all possible means. To Mr Cool's undoing they proved to be no less zealous

in the observance of their moral duty than he himself. Having heard his sermon and looked at the American as he confirmed Aysha's words by nodding his head importantly, they decided that their poor guest was inhabited by the evil spirit Aladyenou. They formed a close circle round Mr Cool and started exorcising the spirit. To do this, they came in relays for two days and two nights, wearing hideous masks, singing, dancing, screaming, striking brass gongs, drumming on skins stretched between poles, thumping on wooden boards with dried pumpkins suspended from them, plucking at the teeth of huge metal combs and at strings attached to coconut shells: in other words, they did all they could to frighten Aladyenou. Mr Cool tried to break away, struck out at them, screamed and shouted for all he was worth, but this only encouraged the Negroes, who believed that the spirit was running riot before abandoning the human body, and they sang and played the more loudly. By the third morning Mr Cool fell silent. I think he was beginning to go mad, for he just sat on the ground and smiled a meaningless and blissful smile. Then, convinced that Aladyenou had been cast out, the Negroes dropped their instruments and brought Mr Cool sweet bamboo-juice to drink.

We went on and at last reached the valley where stood the village of Alaroum, Aysha's home. But instead of huts we saw only the traces of a recent holocaust. There were no people. In a field nearby we found a little piccaninny of about five years old who was sucking the udder of a peacefully grazing she-goat. Seeing us, the little boy tried to run away, and when we had caught him he was unable or unwilling to tell us anything. Aysha wept, threw himself on the ground, dug up the soil with his hands and kissed it. But great though his grief was, we decided to turn back.

Soon we found some soldiers of the Foreign Legion encamped in a small village. They told us that during the last round-up of recruits the people of Alaroum had rebelled and had viciously attacked the camp at night, killing two soldiers. This outbreak, provoked no doubt by the perfidious Germans, had been quickly

put down, the culprits had received exemplary punishment and the village had been burnt to the ground.

One of the larger huts was used as a field-hospital. In it lay two soldiers, one wounded during the suppression of the mutiny, the other suffering from the local fever, his head hidden under his blanket. After chatting with the first about some interesting episodes in the battle, we were preparing to go away when the man on the next straw mat began to cry in perfect Russian: 'Little Negro! Oh you poor little black one! From the height of my divine ego I assert the dignity of man. A drink, a drink!' I ran towards him and snatched off the blanket. Before me lay Alexey Spiridonovich. He gazed at me with unseeing eyes and went on babbling in delirium.

We stayed on in the village waiting for the sick man to recover. Six days later the fever abated suddenly. Alexey Spiridonovich came to and was overjoyed to see us sitting at his bedside. For some reason he was frightened at first on seeing Aysha, but the latter treated him with extreme tenderness, kissed the tips of his hair and gave him a large coconut as a present. Having fortified himself, Alexey Spiridonovich immediately expressed a desire to tell us the story of his life and started with the earliest impressions of his infancy. But the Teacher reminded him that we knew all that almost as well as he did himself, and said it would be better if he confined himself to the last few years.

Alexey Spiridonovich's tale, as always, was long-winded, full of philosophical digressions and deficient in facts, but very sad. Together with other Russians dreaming of sacrifice, St Sophia and freedom, he had been posted to the Foreign Legion. The sergeants and corporals had reproached and humiliated them at every step, saying 'Remember, you've come here to eat the Frenchmen's bread'. Alexey Spiridonovich's arguments that the front was not exactly a comfortable restaurant had no effect. With the Russians there were other legionaries: the Frenchman Cric, who had transformed himself into a Belgian, had spent twelve years in Marseilles peacefully trading in women and was

now working to get himself a clean set of papers; Hunn, a German from Dresden who had murdered his aunt, fled to France and joined the Legion. Hunn swore to everybody that he was either a Pole, an Alsatian or a Holsteiner, but that in any case he could kill Germans as well as the next man. Then there was Jopras the Spaniard, who despised all occupations except war and bull-fighting. He was found unsuitable for the latter on account of natural obesity and clumsiness and, therefore, having robbed a jeweller in Salamanca, he chose the Legion as his future field of activity.

These and similar warriors called the Russians *poire*, the dictionary meaning of which is not only 'pear' but also 'simpleton', and subjected them to all sorts of experiments, drawing on skills acquired in civilian life. Having been in action and spent a year in the trenches under these conditions, the Russians timidly asked the army authorities to transfer them to ordinary French regiments. This request was found more than suspect and it was decided to cure the Russians of their whims by shooting ten of their number. When the criminals began to cry '*Vive la France!*' before the firing-squad it became clear to everyone that here was a dangerous mutiny, and the survivors were hastily despatched to Africa. Among them was Alexey Spiridonovich. In Africa he mended roads, cleaned someone's boots, rounded up Negroes, suppressed Arabs and, while doing all these things, wondered what had become of sacrifice, Christ and St Sophia.

Three weeks previously he had been sent with all the others to put down a Negro revolt. One Negro, quite black and very young, looking just like Aysha, had rushed at him with a lance. He had fired. He thought the Negro was dead. Then fever, and he remembered nothing more.

Hearing this, Aysha began to squcal, jump up and down and weep. 'That was Aglakh, Aysha's brother!' Alexey Spiridonovich also burst into tears and appealed to Jurenito for help.

'Tell me, how can this be? I wanted to save Russia and humanity, sacrifice myself, defend Christ, and instead of that

all I've done is to kill a Negro. Why? What for? I am a man. The divine principle is within me. How can I have fallen so low?'

But the Teacher refused to believe in sacrifice, Christ or the divine principle. He said sombrely: 'You're the wretched slave of Mr Cool, and Mr Cool is the slave of his blue book. The book knows well enough why you should kill disobedient Negroes. It's time you dropped your metaphysics and learned some elementary arithmetic instead. It's both simpler and safer'.

As for Aysha, the Teacher calmed him down by stroking his curly pate and saying: 'It wasn't Alexey Spiridonovich's fault. He had a good corporal too. Alexey Spiridonovich only wanted to put a little cross on the roof of Aia-Sophia, that's a sort of house, you know. But the corporal said "You must fire at Aglakh". You've got your Ultima and your diploma, but Alexey Spiridonovich hasn't got anything. Look, he's crying'.

After these words Aysha disappeared and came back with a long pipe made out of the calabash fruit. He gave it to Alexey Spiridonovich and said: 'Aysha want to give you his arm, but you with two arms, not know where to put it. This very good pipe. Aysha make it. Aysha love you'.

Alexey Spiridonovich recovered slowly. The fever was complicated by a disease of the liver, and Jurenito began to take steps to have him discharged from the army. Two weeks later Alexey Spiridonovich was sent to a military hospital in Toulon, travelling on the same boat as we, thanks to Jurenito's efforts, and there he was found unfit for further service.

## CHAPTER XVIII    The Pope blesses the GBD- Fra Giuseppe

GREAT DISAPPOINTMENTS awaited Mr Cool on his return to Europe. Without its master's loving eye, his economic empire had got into a frightful state of neglect. Almost all the war orders had passed to his competitors. Four ships with valuable cargo had been sunk by German submarines. Some Frenchman or other had invented a new type of funeral wreath with ribbons instead of cockades, which was both cheaper and more attractive. Finally, Mr Cool's zealous missionaries had, with the help of the authorities, closed down eleven brothels of which he himself was the owner.

'The idiots,' he told us in indignation, 'they did not understand that my houses are centres of morality and that the two enterprises cannot exist one without the other!'

All these misfortunes had such an effect on Mr Cool that from a fanatical patriot he was suddenly transformed into an energetic and consistent champion of peace.

'War ruins morals and destroys the national economy,' he said.

We readily agreed. Alexey Spiridonovich, after his experiences in Senegal, could no longer bear to hear the word 'victory', bought books by Tolstoy and proposed to become a vegetarian. Poor orphaned Aysha also thought less highly of the 'kind corporals'. As for me, I had always, in the weakness of my nature, preferred platonic destruction in verse or in fiery talk at the Rotonde to Mr Cool's ideal economy. So it was that all four of us favoured peace, of which we hastened to inform the Teacher.

Jurenito's first response was to laugh merrily and without a trace of malice. 'My simple-hearted boys, do you really think it's so easy to end war? No one can do it, not even those who started it—diplomats, leaders, industrialists, emperors, adven-



turers, nations—no one at all. I'm not too fond of war myself. It was different at first: madness, animal<sup>7</sup> fury, leaps and roars, the sudden familiarity with death, the crash of all earthly goods; in short a magnificent upheaval. Now everybody's got too used to it. Never mind if we're all doomed to death; in the meantime it's good sport. But war has become humdrum. Believe me, it's easier for me to overthrow the German Empire, send 15 million people to the next world, change every school map on earth, than to give a thorough airing to this stuffy, filthy but cosy kennel in which mankind chooses to exist. It isn't that people have adjusted themselves to war, but the war has adjusted itself to people. From a hurricane it has become merely a disagreeable draught. They catch cold, but they manage to carry on somehow. As for putting an end to this adjusted, established war, you can't do it. It's a microbe, a slow and cautious one but one that knows its business. This war has come to stay for decades, perhaps for centuries. Don't laugh—there'll be peace treaties and all sorts of idyllic pleasures in between. The war will change its forms, like a stream that sometimes runs underground. It will resemble an almost repulsively delightful peace. The sick man will go out into the garden to water his pinks until the next attack of recurrent typhoid fever lays him low. The war'll cease to be war, it will install itself cleverly in men's hearts, so that the town boundary, the garden fence, the bedroom threshold will become the front. Started in a fit of apoplexy from a surfeit of irrational force, of unjust, predatory, stolen, lying wealth, it will end only when it has destroyed that in whose name it was begun: hypocritical culture and the leviathan of the State.'

'For all your practical ability,' Mr Cool objected, 'you've always shown an unfortunate tendency towards utopianism. Why talk of things which obviously won't happen until after we're dead? Let's think instead how we can achieve even a little peace. If those who started the war can't end it, surely there are other forces.'

'What forces?'

‘The religious organisations in the first place; say even Rome, despite all its shortcomings. Then the convinced pacifists who used to organise all those meetings and conferences before the war. And then those—’ (Mr Cool stumbled before uttering the dreadful word) ‘—those socialists. Of course they’re an immoral lot and want to destroy all that is sacred, but in this particular case they may be very useful.’

‘Your hopes are without foundation, Mr Cool. As you know, the Christians—to whom, unless memory fails me, you also belong—still continue to work away at their various empires similar to yours, alas, so cruelly destroyed. The pacifists, it’s true, talk very beautifully and movingly about peace, no worse than Alexey Spiridonovich, but when they’re under the command of “good corporals” they’ll slit the bellies of other pacifists with all the zest of our peace-loving Aysha. As for the socialists, their role in wartime reminds me strongly of the occupation—a most respectable one, may I add—recently pursued by our dear Ehrenburg, who tore off tickets at the entrance to your establishment and wept for his prehistoric virginity to the strains of the polka.’

Mr Cool, and Alexey Spiridonovich after him, tried to argue. Strange to tell, both of them, who until recently had seen nothing but patriotic fervour and a thirst for victory all round them, now—after their personal misfortunes—saw the very reverse and assured Jurenito that the nations desired peace. ‘All that’s needed is a unifying centre. It’s our duty to find it.’

The Teacher then said that he did not believe such a search would serve any practical purpose, but being always glad to assist our enlightenment he suggested that we might verify this by undertaking a series of excursions to Rome, Geneva and the Hague, all the more so as these trips would be useful to him, too, in his study of further stages in the disease of mankind.

The decision was taken: we were going to Rome. Mr Cool did not particularly approve of the Catholics—all those tall stories instead of morality—but he had great faith in the power

of the Church. 'Besides, they're Christians after all.' He took with him a new machine-gun, GBD type, a particularly deadly weapon made from the Teacher's drawings: let the Pope look upon this instrument of hell and be horrified. (That apart, candidly speaking, wouldn't it be a good idea to show the GBD to the Italian Minister of War?) Alexey Spiridonovich prepared a speech, for which purpose he scribbled mercilessly all over the collected works of Solov'yev, Dostoevsky and someone else. Aysha went straight to the heart of the matter.

'What's that, the Pope?'

'Christ's Vicar.'

'What's a vicar?' All right. Aysha understands. 'What does Christ like, war or peace? Then His vicar love peace, too.'

And, worn out by so much ratiocination, Aysha could think no further. He jumped about in the railway carriage crying: 'There'll be peace, peace, peace!' It was lucky there were no strangers present. The word peace—now the most indecent and criminal word in the human vocabulary—would have cost us dear.

As for the Teacher, he prepared no speeches and did not argue or listen: he was once more deep in his boring figures—economic conditions, decay of industry, the inevitable crisis—and, tearing himself away for an instant from grey newspaper columns or a sheet of paper covered with writing, he would give a scarcely perceptible but satisfied smile.

We found Rome very little changed after three years' absence. The poverty of Trastevere still more undisguised, the gaudy flags on the uneasy ruins still more absurd—a purely quantitative difference. Wasting no time, we applied at once for an audience with the Holy Father, but this turned out to be a very complicated matter. The Teacher was on the point of resorting again to the successful device of the yard-long passports with red seals, but I protested, remembering my loss of the gift or speech and that profoundly inexpressive *merci*.

'You may see the Holy Father at Easter,' a clerical personage of high rank informed us with contempt.

'But I'm busy!' cried Mr Cool. 'I can't wait. I own three arms factories.'

'Oh, in that case you may see His Holiness tomorrow. I didn't know with whom I had the honour of speaking.'

The next morning we entered the audience room. On Mr Cool's orders, and despite the protests of the Swiss guards, Aysha bravely wheeled the machine-gun in behind us. Someone announced loudly: 'Signor Cool, owner of arms factories, and friends.'

We saw a very sweet wrinkled old man seated in a high arm-chair, who addressed us with the deep feeling of a loving grandfather. 'We bless your useful labours. We wish you the success due to your zeal and beg you not to forget the Holy Church and its orphans.' Having said this, the little old man jabbed the point of his shoe at the faces of each of us in turn (we guessed what was required of us and kissed the shoe) and also, no doubt through absent-mindedness, at the upthrust muzzle of the GBD machine-gun.

When this ritual was over we wanted to proceed with the conversation, but were very quickly and neatly transferred into the next room by the same Swiss guards. There we saw, not the Pope, but a cardinal, who explained: 'You do not talk to the Holy Father. The Holy Father does not speak, he pronounces. But I can answer any questions you may wish to put.'

We were particularly interested in the activities of the Holy See during the war years. These turned out to be very wide and varied. Hundreds of translators were working in the chancellery. To save time, all good wishes, blessing and prayers were translated and sent out simultaneously to all the fighting nations. The representatives of the Church were given instructions on how, say, to celebrate thanksgiving services after a victory, but on some of the instruction leaflets it said 'The crowd disperses, exclaiming "*Vive Dieu! Vive Joffre!*"', on others '*Hoch Gott! Hoch Hindenburg!*' and so forth. In the event of a decisive victory or defeat it was recommended to explain the first by God's grace and the prayers of the 'holy

apostolic', the second by God's punishment for insufficient fervour in the service of the 'holy apostolic', etc. Catholics everywhere must support the war until its victorious conclusion. The task was a complex but a grateful one: these were days of trial, of religious revival. 'War is a beautiful thing if you know how to understand it.'

'But it says "Thou shalt not kill",' Alexey Spiridonovich groaned.

'Of course it does, my son; and no one can abolish the Fifth Commandment. But the Scriptures are a holy book, you have to know how to interpret it. The Church in its mercy has relieved you and its other children of that impossible task by taking the whole labour of understanding and interpreting the divine truth on its selfless shoulders.'

'But can there be several interpretations of "Thou shalt not kill"?''

Alexey Spiridonovich refused to give in, but I, remembering the experience of the Labardan mission and knowing the unpleasant consequences to which a passion for interpreting lofty matters may lead, tugged at his sleeve and succeeded at last in dragging him away.

Mr Cool turned out to be a better diplomat. After lavishly praising the activities of the Holy See and of the cardinal himself, he modestly asked what we—one true Catholic, one Protestant, one Greek Orthodox, one idolater and one Jew (but a very well-behaved one, so that you could scarcely tell)—could do to restore peace in Europe in accordance with the desires of all mankind.

'I, too, long for peace,' said the cardinal, 'and I pray for it every morning, noon and evening, and even at night. Meanwhile I would advise you, if your country's affairs are going badly—which I venture to guess by the fact that you are so anxious to have peace—to give this charming object, I mean this infernal weapon, to my friend the bishop of Vienna, who is known for his passion—a most innocent one, to be sure—for collecting as yet unknown specimens of such bric-à-brac.'

This would, of course, provide you with the means of settling down in comfort and praying undisturbed for the restoration of universal peace.'

However, Mr Cool was—as can be seen from the preceding chapters—a man of principle, and he rejected the tempting proposition politely but categorically. Then the cardinal suggested that we might become commercial travellers for the Holy See and deliver various useful articles to the Allied countries. Although this would not bring peace any nearer, Mr Cool, being devoted to the work from childhood, did not refuse, and the cardinal, having given us his blessing, sent us to see Fra Giuseppe, a Dominican monk in charge of the sale of the aforesaid articles.

After passing through many rooms and corridors we entered a large hall resembling the floor of a department store. In one corner there hung all sorts of small crosses and medals supposed to protect soldiers from death and wounds. A large number of grateful letters from those who had experienced the protective properties of these objects on their own person, gathered into a fairly thick volume, bore witness to their efficacy. In another corner were all the requisites of military chaplains—mobile chapels equipped according to the last word in modern technique, portable altars, and even explanatory drawings for the performance of various rites, such as sprinkling batteries with holy water, blessing airmen about to drop bombs, etc. In a third corner were *ex voto* offerings, i.e. gifts to be presented to the Virgin Mary and other favourite saints after a successful attack. For those who had remained unharmed there were toy soldiers in various uniforms, for those who had been wounded but had since recovered there were wax arms and legs on a thread, for ships' passengers saved from torpedoes there were delightful model boats, and, finally, for governments which had won the war there were magnificent relief maps of Europe with adjustable frontiers to meet any eventuality.

We examined with great curiosity all these devices which so obviously refuted the malicious statements of the unbelievers

that the Church had become petrified and no longer showed any signs of life. Engrossed, we did not even notice when Fra Giuseppe—the man we had been waiting for—came into the room, and were startled when we heard a great yell of ‘Signor! Dear, dear, Signor!’ We looked round in a fright, and the ancient walls of the Vatican witnessed once again a scene of that tender, guileless, brotherly reunion which so befitted them. Fra Giuseppe was none other than our own jolly Ercole. He was dressed in a habit with a rope tied round his waist; in his hand he carried a cypress-wood rosary, and his head gleamed with an immaculate tonsure.

‘So, my friend, you have shaken the dust of the sinful world from your feet and have dedicated yourself to the salvation of your soul?’ Mr Cool asked solemnly.

‘That’s what you think!’ And Ercole, remembering the via Pascudini, spat contemptuously upon the ancient holiness of the marble floor. ‘What was I to do? There’s a war on.’

We happened to know for a fact that no mobilisation orders for the replenishment of monasteries had been proclaimed anywhere, and were therefore at a loss to grasp the connection between the war with Austria and our friend’s unexpected get-up. For him, however, that connection was obviously a reality because he did not even attempt to explain it to us. Instead, he began to plead with the Teacher to engage him once more as a *cicerone* and take him away to some other country, for the excess of holiness surrounding him had made him depressed, bad-tempered and desiccated like those ‘English asses’ of old, who, alas, no longer came to visit Rome.

The Teacher insisted that he should first satisfy our legitimate curiosity by explaining all, and particularly the tonsure. Ercole made a mysterious gesture with his finger, looked round to make sure no one was near, and took us into the next room, which was unbelievably dirty. We sat down on the bed—resembling in colour and shape the via Pascudini dear to Ercole’s heart—and began to drink wine produced by Ereole and bearing the highly suitable name of *Lacrima Christi*. While

we drank, Ercole told us his story, which he interspersed generously with exclamations, oaths and assurances that he wasn't lying.

When he had first come back to Italy it had been all great fun. Everybody had wanted war, gone about the streets with flags and shouted '*Evviva!*' Once they had even smashed a scoundrel's Austrian's shop, and Bambucci had got away with two candlesticks and a bronze lizard. Then war had been declared and Ercole had been called up. That hadn't been too bad either. One beautiful lady had given him a bunch of flowers and ten soldi. Also he had gone into all the *trattorie* and drunk a lot of wine. But then! Then! What a scandal! He had been swindled. A hundred thousand devils! What kind of a war was that? A slaughterhouse, that's what it was! Not only had he, Ercole, had to fire, but others had fired at him, and not half! Ercole wasn't fool enough to sit and wait till he was killed. He had seen wounded men. Yes! And dead men, too! With his own eyes!

From the mere memory of these horrors Ercole lost all his strength and fell silent. Only after drinking two glasses of wine was he able to resume his tragic tale. He had decided to run away, or rather not run at all but simply go back to the via Pascudini. They had grabbed him as if he'd committed a murder, kept him in gaol for three months, and then sent him back to the same place. Ercole had understood that you had to use cunning to get out of this, but how? He had consulted his comrades. The fools! The jackasses! They had suggested all sorts of idiotic things—for instance, that he should put a bullet through his own hand. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Not an Austrian's hand, not a general's, but his own! As if he had a hundred hands! Imbeciles! No, he had thought of something worth two of that. He had stood on 'the slope of a hill—not a very high one—and at the first shot he had slid down on his behind, laid himself flat and started to yell for all he was worth: 'I'm dying! A priest!' They had picked him up and taken him to the field-hospital. The doctor: 'What's the matter with you?'



'A bullet grazed me and I slid down into the precipice.'

'What bullet? There isn't a trace.'

'So you want there to be traces? Maybe you'd like me to be dead? I tell you a bullet grazed me and threw me down, and then it flew on. When they picked me up I couldn't walk. I'm lame!'

He had even tried to limp with both legs, but it hadn't come off. The doctor, though of course he was a bloodsucker and wanted Ercole's death, hadn't really been too bad; he hadn't asked too many questions and said Ercole had concussion. Word of honour!

'So they sent me on leave, three months of it. Well, I wasn't fool enough to go into that rat-trap for a second time.

'I got back to Rome. But would you believe it? First of all, those bandits everywhere want to see your documents. Secondly, not a single English ass, so that you could die of hunger without any bullets at all. I had to find something. Of course I could have become a newspaper editor. A respectable gentleman said so when I was telling them at the *osteria* what a wonderful thing war was, what a hero I'd been and how everyone ought to volunteer for the front. For I'm not a traitor, I'm no Austrian scum, I'm an honest patriot. I still say *Evviva Italia!* But in order to be an editor you've got to be able to write and know all sorts of other tricks. So that wouldn't do.'

Then he had met a monk who had fallen in love with a terribly rich *signorina* and wanted to elope with her. They had made a deal. The monk had become Private Bambucci on authorised leave, Ercole had become Fra Giuseppe, an itinerant monk of the Dominican order. Splendid; but you've got to eat even when you're dressed up in a habit. He had tried collecting for the decoration of churches in the Holy Land. But those mean godless swine, may the devil boil them in rancid oil! He hadn't collected enough for a litre of wine in a whole day. And the prices!

Then he had taken a medal off his neck and sold it to a soldier for two lire, saying it would protect him from bullets.

Then he had bought three more medals for one lira, and so the business had been launched.

He would take up a position near the railway station and shout: 'Attention! Dear defenders of the fatherland! Do you know what a bullet is? It roars and whistles, it makes a great noise and penetrates the body, rips up the intestines, pierces the heart, the liver and the navel. But there is a sure protection against it: this image of Saint Catherine of Siena. Put it on your breast and no bullet will touch you. It will bounce off the holy image and fly back towards the damned Austrians. Look, here is an image with the traces of a bullet upon it. You can see it has come to no harm. Three hundred letters of thanksgiving lie in my cell. Hurry! These are the last of the images blessed by the bishop himself. None of the others are worth a single soldo. Hurry! One lira! One lira!'

And they had come and bought.

The abbot of San Giovanni, who happened to be passing that way, had taken favourable notice of Ercole and sent him along to see the bishop, who in turn had sent him to the cardinal. His talents had been duly appreciated and he had been entrusted with the running of the little shop inside the Vatican. That was the whole story. Oh yes, the most important thing: the tonsure. He had had a lot of difficulty with that. He had been afraid to go to the barber's, and so he had bought an old razor at the market for ten soldi and had been obliged to scrape the crown of his head himself. A beastly job. Altogether he wasn't satisfied. Whenever anyone came into the shop he had to finger his beads and mutter under his breath as if he were saying his prayers. You weren't supposed to lie down or spit, except in the most exceptional circumstances. Altogether it wasn't a life but a perpetual penance. The devil take it! I say, signor, aren't you planning a revolution, even a very little one? That would be much more fun than fighting a war or fingering those horrid little wooden balls.

'On the contrary,' the Teacher replied, 'we are in an extremely peaceful frame of mind. We actually came here to seek peace.'

'Never mind,' cried Ercole, 'if not a revolution, let's at least have peace and get back to the via Pascudini. I'm your man!'

He threw off his habit and we were amazed to see with our own eyes the power of tradition among the Italian people. Ercole retained the stratifications of many epochs upon his body, to wit, the primary rags which he had worn for a shirt in happier days, the striped pants given him by the Teacher, and a uniform tunic of military cut.

As we went out through the age-old gates of the Vatican, without peace but with our Ercole in his eclectic costume restored to us and with the machine-gun being dragged along by Aysha, we afforded a few moments' pleasure to the Swiss guards who, no longer amused even by their own garb, were almost falling asleep with boredom.

The same night we took the train for Paris.

# 1713 rules of humane killing— we are torpedoed—extra- ordinary construction of the Patria Hotel for Socialists

THE VOYAGE TO ROME and Ercole's dramatic description of war confirmed us still more in our pacific intentions. The desire for peace manifested itself with particular strength in Alexey Spiridonovich. After reading *Crime and Punishment* for the tenth time and remembering his little Negro he firmly resolved to suffer in order to redeem his guilt. Raskolnikov's example pointed the way, and one morning Alexey Spiridonovich came out on the Place de l'Opéra, dropped down on the pavement at the entrance to the Métro and began to shout: 'Bind me! Judge me! I have killed a man'. A policeman came running at once and wanted to know when and where the crime had been committed. But when Alexey Spiridonovich explained to him that he had killed a Negro during a rebellion, the policeman, instead of binding him, became very affable, pulled him to his feet, gave him a friendly slap on the back and said: 'You're a fine fellow and a brave soldier, only you shouldn't drink too much in the mornings'. And so our friend's attempt to follow in the footsteps of the heroes of Russian literature ended in failure.

We no longer put any hopes in the Church but decided instead to go to the Hague to visit the International Society of Friends and Supporters of Peace.

Arriving in a neutral country we became conscious at once of an abrupt change. Everyone, including deserters of all nations, spoke of peace with great feeling, proud not to be taking part in the barbaric war. At the same time they were terrified that the war might end soon because they were supply-

ing the fighting powers with all sorts of goods, often of a far from pacific nature. Despite our insufficient knowledge of the Dutch language we understood them without difficulty because a similar love of peace had inspired Mr Cool before our trip to Senegal.

As soon as we had accustomed ourselves a little to neutral psychology we set out for the Peace Palace. To our extreme surprise we found inside it a number of highly intelligent-looking people examining bayonets of various designs. I was so startled that I thought we might have landed in the Ministry of War instead of the Peace Palace owing to our ignorance of the language. But the intelligent-looking gentlemen, who spoke all languages to perfection, reassured us by explaining that they were studying the bayonets used by all the armies to ascertain whether any of them were counter to the detailed rules established—unless I am mistaken—in 1886. We learned many interesting things here: war, it appeared, was by no means the savage slaughter we had thought it, but a thing elevated and ennobled by 1713 rules on humane methods of killing people.

‘Don’t you understand, I’ve killed a man!’ Alexey Spiridonovich roared.

‘What with?’

‘What do you mean, what with? I fired at him and I killed him.’

‘What kind of a bullet was it?’

‘An ordinary one.’

‘If it wasn’t a dum-dum bullet, your action does not constitute a violation of the humane rules.’

We decided that these were merely rank and file members of the Society, and went to a meeting of the Committee. Six old men were sitting in comfortable armchairs sucking at their cigars.

‘We all love peace very, very much,’ the oldest of them told us, ‘but what can we do? There are six of us on the Committee and seven more in the Society. All of us are citizens of neutral countries and past the call-up age. The others, for some reason,

are all very fond of war. A bad peace is better than a good war, but a good war is better than a bad war. That is why we are making sure that everyone should kill each other honourably and in a decent fashion.'

We asked the old men whether they could not, after all, advise us what we could do to pacify Europe. 'You can become full members of the Society of Friends and Supporters of Peace, and then we shall have nineteen members. We shall give you interesting and important work to do. As you know, use is being made of gases not provided for in any of the 1713 paragraphs. To repudiate them altogether would be excessively pedantic and reactionary. You will have to examine and classify these gases. Then, at the next conference after the end of the war, we shall be able to pass a resolution limiting the use of those gases which cause most distress to the human being as he chokes to death.'

We promised to enrol in the Society but declined the job of examining the gases, explaining our refusal by a desire to strive actively for the restoration of peace.

'Look here,' said another of the old men, 'I could offer you work, too, but first allow me to inquire which particular peace you want?'

'How do you mean, which peace?'

'Excuse me, I've never heard of peace without a qualifying adjective. We have one paper here which preaches Pax Britannica and another which is all for Pax Germanica. You can choose either. Both of them offer good pay in local currency.'

That wasn't any use either. We began to take our leave. All the old men except the chairman had by now dozed off and were muttering in their sleep: 'Down with war! Bertha Suttner! Shame, shame! Good night'.

At the entrance to the Palace a very pleasant Scandinavian, seeing our disappointed faces, came up to us and said: 'Do not despair. Keep trying, young men. Write anti-war novels, and perhaps you'll get a Nobel prize in 1930. Or else try smuggling cheese into Germany'.

Amidst the prevailing bestiality these neutral hearts had retained a true love of mankind.

We left Holland with a bottle of excellent Advokaat and a wealth of moving memories, but still without peace. Our misery was so great that fate, it seems, had the philanthropic intention of cutting it short. During the crossing from Flushing to Hull our small ship, the *Hannibal*, was sunk by a German submarine, and for twenty-four hours we drifted in a small lifeboat in the open sea. During those solemn hours each of us was convinced of his impending death, and each expressed this in his own way. The Teacher alone maintained a perfect, I might almost say an everyday, calm. He occupied himself with us, joked with Aysha and told the story of how, as a child, he had taken it into his head to cross the Atlantic in a beer barrel, but the waves—alas!—had washed him back on shore after a few minutes. I asked him whether the thought of inevitable death meant nothing to him. The Teacher shrugged his shoulders.

‘It’s a matter of habit. I don’t feel secure on dry land either. My *Hannibal* was sunk long ago.’

Mr Cool tore a leaf out of his cheque-book and wrote his will with a Waterman pen which he wore clipped to his breast-pocket. He was leaving all his money to the Missionary Society. Then, remembering the Pope, he added: ‘pay one dollar to each orphan left by soldiers killed by an arrow manufactured by Cool & Co.’. When he had finished writing he put the piece of paper in the Advokaat bottle which Aysha happened to have kept in his pocket (we had, of course, drunk up the liqueur long ago) and threw it in the sea. Then, an enlightened man faithful to the traditions of American multi-millionaires, he began to sing *Nearer my God to Thee* in a terribly flat voice. Aysha, startled at first, began to cry but the Teacher calmed him down and even managed to amuse him, so that he finally fell asleep in the middle of a game, his head on the Teacher’s lap.

What Alexey Spiridonovich did is easy to imagine: he told the story of his life, insisting that everyone should listen with

particular attention, for this was not just a story but a last confession. Having told it all and even repeated the most interesting bits twice, he greeted death with a quotation: 'O Daughter, lightest Ether!' Finally, whimpering, he began to stare into the empty distance in case a rescuing ship should appear on the horizon.

Ercole heaped all the imprecations he knew upon the Teacher, all the rest of us, the Germans, the British, war, peace and the sea. Damnation! He might have been mumbling *Ave's* or drinking *Lacrima Christi* at this very moment, instead of dying. Was it worth while falling from that perilous height? Traitors!

The regular swell of the sea made me sleepy and I began to nod. A succession of pictures passed before my eyes. I am eight years old, I have a live cat's tail wound round my wrist and I am whipping my sisters with the cat. The grown-ups disarm me with difficulty and lock me in the coal-shed. I tear off my clothes and roll in the black dust. When at last the door is unlocked I leap out and frighten Platonovna, our Nanny, who squats down on her heels and crosses herself in terror. Then I run into the dining-room and throw a lighted lamp on the floor. They must have put the fire out. A pity.

Now I am fifteen. I am a revolutionary. A meeting at the Farbe dyeworks beyond the Moscow River. The police. I run. I climb over a barbed-wire fence and leave my trousers behind. Crash! I fall into a vat of dye. The police do not arrest me, but do as Platonovna had done: 'The devil, Lord help us, the devil himself!'

Five years later. I have become religious. Jammes, the author, has introduced me to the monks. Lourdes, Claudel and the rest. Father Innokenty. Tomorrow I shall be baptized. Then religious vows. I have chosen the name of Brother Hippolyte. Not bad! Last hour of instruction. But inside me, not in my brain but somewhere in the pit of my stomach, a spring has broken. Holy father? Ha ha! Allow me to play you something on the guitar. 'Oh flowers, pretty, pretty flowers'. I'm sick of



you, you lenten faces. How about the daughter . . . I mean Filia Virginia planting parsley, celery and other vegetables in her little kitchen garden? Wouldn't be bad, would it, father? Then I collapse on the floor—crash—and start crawling about on all fours: Lord, Lord, Lord have mercy! Why don't you pierce me with gimlets, pinch me, beat me until it dies, my rotten carcass? But the holy father, just like Nanny, plucks up the hem of his habit in terror and mutters in a corner: 'Out! Away! Help!' And I am in the Paris train. Third class. It's crowded. Sailors. My sixth litre, I think. They sway, the scoundrels. Why won't you keep still?

All these pictures flashed before my eyes. I sought a meaning, solid ground, but there was none. Then the pictures vanished and only verbs were left: sucked, squealed, hit, went to school, prayed, kissed, drifted, drank, whined, wrote, masticated and more, more, more. The verbs made the boat rock still harder. Then I suddenly realized that the meaning was in the rocking, insenseless movement, rotation, change. I stood up, shouted: 'Life, I bless you!' and began to vomit.

In the evening an English fishing ketch saw us and picked us up, and two nights later we were already dining in a Paris restaurant. Having rested from all we had been through, we once again tackled the various declensions of the word 'peace' and, having tried the abbots and pacifists, we decided to appeal to people of a dark and dubious kind, namely the socialists. For this purpose we betook ourselves to Geneva.

I have seen many methods of housing people and many fanciful architectural inventions in my day—skyscrapers, the cellars of Rheims during the war, Danish saloon ferries, Paris *pissoirs*, the plans for Tatlin's monument to the Third International—but all of them pale in comparison with the ingenuity of the Patria Hotel specially equipped for socialist delegations.

We went there with great trepidation. Mr Cool, the originator of the whole trip, could not conceal his fear. He dressed as simply as he could and put a bullet-proof metal armour under his workman's blouse. 'Say what you will, they're subversion-

ists,' he argued in self-justification. Moreover, he ordered Aysha to carry a huge red flag. Thus it was that we entered the large courtyard of the Patria (there were two entrances, but we weren't allowed to use one of them because we failed to produce letters of recommendation from some Minister or other), where Mr Cool began singing the *Internationale*. But his voice was drowned by dozens of others singing *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles* on the right and *Rule Britannia* on the left.

The layout of the courtyard was remarkable in itself. There were two large wings, one decorated with flags of the Allied nations, the other with German ones. Between them were ditches, banks of rubble and barbed-wire barriers more complicated than anything I had seen at the front. In the centre stood an open pavilion which harboured a few ancient democrats surrounded by piles of protests and resolutions. Seeing our helplessness one of these kindly called us over.

'Tell me, are there many subversionists here, or rather revolutionaries?' Such was Mr Cool's first question.

'At present there are at the Patria four Ministers, eleven deputy Ministers, nine chiefs of Government propaganda departments—' Mr Cool interrupted him with an anxious cry to Aysha: 'Tear up that flag, quick!' Then the old man explained to us the cunning construction of the Patria.

Delegations of the two coalitions were housed in the two wings. To avoid being compromised they not only did not meet but did not even correspond with each other, all of them being good and honourable patriots. But, being socialists and members of the International as well, they were anxious to ensure renewal of fraternal relations after the war. For that purpose posters with resolutions, protests and denials were put out periodically from the windows of both wings. No one could object to this, for anybody can do anything he likes in his own rooms. And comrades representing the neutral countries were housed in the pavilion, from where they even negotiated with the opposing sides.

All this was a little complicated but obviously an invention

of genius. We started the proceedings and Mr Cool shouted: 'O subversionists, I mean Ministers, I mean comrades, are you against war?'

Two posters appeared outside the windows at once. The one read: 'Yes. We are fighting against the imperialism of the Allies and their accomplices, false Socialists who started the criminal war'. The other read: 'Of course. Down with German imperialism and its pseudo-Socialist stooges who are guilty of the shameful slaughter'. These excessively similar replies made me suspicious: perhaps the opponents communicated with each other by means of underground passages? But a neutral democrat reassured me, explaining the closeness in the enemies' outlook by spiritual kinship and the comradely solidarity of socialists the world over.

Then Alexey Spiridonovich asked: 'Do you intend to protest against the war?' The posters replied that they had to ask their respective Governments first, and an hour later we read: 'Shame on those who set fire to Rheims Cathedral! We protest before the whole civilised world against German methods of waging war'. And: 'The atrocities of the Cossacks and the black troops cry to heaven. Down with the Allies who trample upon European culture!'

'What shall we do to bring peace nearer?' we asked.

'Set up a republic in Russia, Italy, France and Ireland!' the Germans replied.

'Set up a republic in Germany, Austria and Turkey! Prove to the neutral workers that they must join our side,' the Allies recommended.

Ercole started yelling: 'A swindle! We're for peace', and let off a squib just to see what would happen. There were frightened cries of 'A bomb! A bomb!' and two touchingly identical posters appeared at once: 'Do not forget we are Socialists. Why don't you decorate the hall of a good-class hotel where we might all meet after the war? Remember to put red flags on the walls. Please don't throw any bombs at us. Long live the International! Have you understood?' Soon some

policemen came and asked us not to disturb the worthy revolutionaries.

Leaving the torn scraps of our red flag in the courtyard we wandered off to a beer-shop, still no nearer to peace.

'Charming people, those socialists, and so well-mannered,' Mr Cool remarked as he threw off his armour which prevented him from settling down comfortably in an armchair.

'And so you all recognise that the disease is incurable, and no longer believe in the efficacy of valerian drops,' said the Teacher. 'Now we can go home and get on with our good and honourable business.'

## CHAPTER XX | Monsieur Delet gets a decoration—the Teacher on war—we are captured by the Germans

IN PARIS, however, we were awaited by all kinds of unpleasantness. In the first place, the hotel landlady—having first asked us good-naturedly whether we weren't Germans by any chance—told us that a certain gentleman was showing exceptional interest in us and had questioned her closely on where we went on our frequent journeys, what we had for breakfast and what were our general opinions. Although our journeys were quite idyllic in their innocence, we were none too pleased by the gentleman's curiosity, particularly when we heard that he was 'most respectable' and wore a ribbon in his lapel. However, our uneasiness was of short duration, for on the morning after our return we were politely invited to present ourselves in a certain place. There we were received with all conceivable courtesy and a written denunciation of our activities. It was a large sheet of paper on which the following was written, or rather drawn, in beautiful letters: 'Memorandum on the latest activities of five German spies, based on reports submitted by a representative of the League for the Investigation of Suspicious Events'. Everything was put down and explained in a most impressive fashion: the above-mentioned spies were engaged on selling machine-guns to Germany via Holland. They had approached the Pope in connection with proposals for a separate peace. They had arranged the sinking of a ship on which they themselves were travelling, but had, of course, remained unscathed. Bribed by German socialists ('Wilhelm's flunkies') they had thrown a bomb at some French socialists, severely frightening one of them, a deputy Minister of War Supply. Having listed the main charges, the personage interviewing us

politely explained that such a way of life generally ended facing a firing squad.

After that everything went on as usual. Ercole howled, Mr Cool sang hymns, and so forth. 'Here comes the representative of the League,' someone said. 'He'll complete the information regarding your behaviour. After that the court-martial and a few other formalities, but it will all, I assure you, be over within 24 hours.'

A day and a night! Howl, Ercole! Sing, Mr Cool! He comes, dread Azrael, unspeakable messenger of death! But why is the Teacher so light of heart? Why does he smile and nod his head? Why, instead of '*Ave, Caesar*', does he cry '*Bonjour, Monsieur*'? I do not understand. I am afraid to look round. I look round . . .

'Monsieur Delet, dear, dear friend! Are you alive? And Zizi? And the carrots? Are we destined, then, to see you before we die?'

'Nonsense. That swine of a *boche* isn't with you, is he? Well, that's all right then. It was my colleague's doing, but don't you worry. *Monsieur le commandant*, there's been an obvious misunderstanding. My business partners. Yes, yes, I'll vouch for them. You're free, my friends. And now let's be off to the Chatelet, it's the aperitif hour!'

So ended yet another attempt by fate to substitute for the universal peace we so much desired a separate peace for the five of us alone.

Anyone who knows the joy of meeting after a long separation, the charm of unchanged habits, the sweetness of shared memories, the delight of forgotten intimacy, will easily understand how we felt over our sherry. Dear Monsieur Delet! He was the same as ever, pills in pocket, clarity of vision and lightness of mind. True, instead of Zizi—who had been unfaithful to him with four (if only it had been just one!) Arabs—Lucie now lived in the little house; true, sweet peas no longer bloomed in the garden, replaced by ordinary peas in defence of the fatherland; but these were mere details. Monsieur Delet's

rosy cheeks were often, though momentarily, aglow with the reflection of universal fires, and his *élan*, his delightful, vigorous *élan* squeezing the cork out of the bottle, was now directed entirely towards the sacred cause of defending civilisation and the fatherland.

The League was wonderful. Only yesterday someone ~~that~~ noticed that a certain Cru went out for walks—~~would~~ you believe it?—between midnight and 2 a.m., ate at dawn, pursued no occupation, wore a beard and shaved his moustache. And what do you think they found among his things? A German-French dictionary, a brass army button and finally (the impudence of it!) right in the middle of the table, a pile of photographs showing various fortifications: and the scoundrel swore that they were reproductions of the work of somebody called Picasso—most probably another spy. A clear case!

Besides the League, there was the bacteriological laboratory. What's a passport? A scrap of paper. Monsieur Delet had heard a conversation in German with his own ears near the Bastille; let them try to convince him it was Yiddish, he wasn't fool enough to be taken in by that. And why was the name Silberstein written up over the shop? Surely that's German? Of course he was a man without prejudice and did not believe in all those clerical fables. Christ had never existed, that had been proved a hundred times over, so that the Jews could not have sold Christ anyway. But France did exist, and Monsieur Delet himself was an undeniable fact; and the Jews could sell both France and him. Forget about your passport! A prick of your little finger, a drop of blood: under the microscope with it. It'll be seen at once whether the blood is clean or Prussian. His scientists had found a method. He would unmask them all. The other day they had tested a general—and what happened? The analysis showed 0.6 German microbes. It would be a good thing to creep into Malvy's, the Minister's, bedroom at night and prick his finger on the quiet—he'd undoubtedly turn out to be a German.

Monsieur Delet's third occupation was the National League

for the Apprehension of Persons Attempting to Evade Conscription. A medical certificate? Nonsense. A hernia? Let's see it, please. You've lost an eye in the war? Would you mind taking out your artificial one? Monsieur Delet kept a watchful eye on all women who cropped their hair or spoke in a deep voice. A skirt isn't a guarantee, you know. You've got to delve into the substance.

Neither did Monsieur Delet rest during his leisure hours, oh no! He went straight on working, writing articles. 'Down with the defeatists! We have captured a ferryman's cottage on the Isère. The Portuguese are with us. Syria's not bad either.' He contributed to ten newspapers: the *Pontoise Morning Star*, the *Clermont-Ferrand Drumbeat*, the *Bayonne New Herald*, etc. He believed in us. We wanted peace, did we? Oh, peace would come, immediately, next year, next month, next week perhaps. It was only a matter of finishing off those bandits and taking Berlin. We must help to bring this about. The best way was to become journalists. A sacred cause. The pen was a weapon. Then we should win the war, everything would be fine once more, the little garden, Lucie. The skies of France, how glorious they were! Another little glass, and then to work!

Monsieur Delet's proposal seemed to us a tempting one. As I have already said, Mr Cool's economic empire was in a pitiful state. The Teacher believed in the great organising—and therefore also destructive—power of the penny press. Alexey Spiridonovich, long unsatisfied both by us and by chance encounters in railway trains, longed to pour out his soul into some larger receptacle. I, too, by force of journalistic habit, preferred writing copy to trundling trolleys or tearing off those awful tickets. In short, without standing on ceremony we agreed at once.

The Teacher and Mr Cool split America between them. The first took over the newspapers of the twenty-two republics of South and Central America; the second, the United States Press Association covering 817 various periodicals. Aysha was excused from all activities in view of the lack of any periodical press in Senegal. Matters were more complicated where Ercole was



concerned. Unfortunately he could neither read nor write. But we all agreed that he had a remarkable newspaper style, with the required sweep and titanic pathos. It was decided that Ercole should dictate the telegrams for the *Giornale del Arezzo* and Jurenito should take them down. Alexey Spiridonovich refused to write telegrams because he despised brevity. How could ~~he~~ in a hundred words, express the full torment and ~~sweetness~~ of sacrifice, the horror of sin and his faith in the Third Reign of the Holy Spirit? He preferred to send immensely long letters headed 'Beyond the Last Frontier' to a newspaper which, though ancient, had nevertheless retained its virginity, namely the *Russkiye Vedomosti*. As for me—some readers will no doubt recall this—I became a regular correspondent of the not-too-exacting *Russian Stock Exchange Gazette*, popularly known in Russia as the *Birzhevka*.

All of us, including Monsieur Delet and with his assistance, set out for the front. First we resolved to write only about what we could actually see: 'It's raining. A soldier is standing at his post, soaking wet. He addresses us as follows: "What do you think you're doing here, sons of a she-toad?" We can hear the sound of gunfire. Two other soldiers are playing cards. At the last station a peasant woman sold us five stale eggs for 10 francs and asked whether there would soon be peace. We are feeling rather excited. Monsieur Delet, chairman of 33 patriotic societies, said in an interview kindly granted us over an aperitif that Germany would be routed'. In reply, however, we received telegrams from our various editorial offices instructing us not to waste any more money on such bilge but, instead, to describe duels between hydroplanes and tanks, bloody battles underground and interviews with commanders-in-chief every day, and to fly to Egypt and go by submarine to the Dardanelles three times a week. We ~~taught~~ on at once and proceeded to execute our orders with the utmost conscientiousness. To remain at the front any further became futile and even harmful, as it merely cluttered up the pure realm of our fancy with humdrum details. Nevertheless the Teacher insisted that we should pro-

ceed as far as the foremost positions. In order to establish a prognosis of the disease, he wished once more to analyse the blood, pus and urine of humanity.

Having coped successfully with a dozen different Headquarters we reached the outskirts of Verdun. There we were involved in a rather curious incident which, however, did not fit into any of the categories mentioned by our editorial offices and therefore received no publicity.

At an observation point near the Marr fortress we met three soldiers. They were dressed in a highly unorthodox manner, with knitted bonnets over their steel helmets, quilted blankets on their shoulders, their feet encased in large watertight balloons and the bonnets, blankets and balloons in their turn covered with a scaly rind of reddish mud resembling an elephant's hide. To reach them we had to crawl on our bellies along a trench torn up by shells, sinking half-way into liquid earth, human excrement and piles of dead rats. After wiping his hands and face on his handkerchief, Monsieur Delet addressed the soldiers with the following greeting: 'Dear *poilus*! Europe, America, the country of the Rising Sun and both poles are looking at you, selfless heroes defending freedom and justice. Today, as I crawled to these historic spots, I personally shared in your sufferings, so that I can now greet you as an equal, for all that I wear a bowler hat. We shall stand fast—I mean you'll stand here and we'll stand at our shop counters, ministerial desks and café tables—until the hour when the cannibals, exhausted, drop at our feet. Allow me to present you with a small gift—my patriotic article in the latest issue of the *Gascony Triumph*, where I say *de l'audace, de l'audace et encore de l'audace* (these are the words of my last mistress but one, or rather Danton's spoken on an earlier occasion for a different reason). Let us remain firm to the end'.

This speech was certainly no worse than many others I have heard at press banquets—it even compared favourably with them in its conciseness and lucidity—so that what followed must have been purely accidental. One of the soldiers, the

oldest and quietest of the three, swore softly under his breath and then said: 'You'd do better to tell us what's the news about peace, Mr Patriot'. Monsieur Delet, offended, said nothing, but Alexey Spiridonovich was delighted.

'My brother, you, too, are for peace, for love! Killing is sin. This rifle pollutes your hands.'

'Hold on a minute,' the soldier protested, 'a rifle's all right' (here he even stroked the butt) 'provided you know what to do with it. Now if it was a matter of putting an end to all those generals, politicians, officers, civilians, priests, socialists, society ladies and the rest of them . . . that would be talking.'

'But who'd be left then?' Mr Cool asked, businesslike as ever. To this the soldier gave the utterly meaningless reply: 'I spit on that', following the words by indeed spitting juicily on the ground.

The second soldier, a much more temperamental character with the appearance of a Southerner, saw fit to make a whole speech in reply to Monsieur Delet's. In quoting the exact text in translation I beg the reader to forgive me, and him, for a certain over-expressiveness in the figures of speech employed.

'Dear pen-pusher, thanks for the paper, we defenders of justice are in great need of it. Moreover, you may, taking with you the Rising Sun and your five lousy friends, go and put yourself straight away in a cow's stomach. I am happy that you have soiled your stinking mug even slightly with the products of my creation, for I, like you in your newspaper office, also produce something twice a day. I hope you spend the rest of your life surrounded by camel dung. A hundred thousand bald-headed pumpkins! Navel of a she-pope! Get into your aunt's woollen drawers, drink dandelion tea and sneeze under a cat's tail.'

No sooner had Monsieur Delet slightly recovered from this strange invitation than the third soldier, a young fellow without a moustache, crying 'one gift deserves another', pulled a dead rat out of a puddle by the tail and thrust it into Monsieur Delet's lapel, which normally housed something of a very

different nature. Though we had pronounced no speeches and had earned no gifts, still, on witnessing the soldiers' energetic approach, we quickly dropped to the ground and crawled away with all possible speed.

Having reached a spot that was more sheltered in every respect, we began to discuss Monsieur Delet's misadventure. Ercole was thrilled by all he had seen. Referring to Monsieur Delet's unusual decoration he cried with deep emotion: 'That was a gesture worthy of a Roman!' Alexey Spiridonovich was anxious to 'grasp the soldiers' soul'. 'They are rough and full of anger, but I feel within myself that they are as devoted to the cause of peace as I. Friends, we have by chance encountered three followers of our great Tolstoy.'

'Your simple-mindedness,' the Teacher replied to him, 'is assuming the form of an anecdote from the lives of the saints. If there are many like you in Russia I am surprised it hasn't yet been dismantled down to the last stone by those who do not try to grasp other people's souls at every step and do not consider it a sin to deceive those who wish to be deceived. These soldiers are by no means pacifists. They would gladly pin the same decoration as the one they gave Monsieur Delet on the Pope, the Hague humanists, Romain Rolland and all the rest of your saintly peace-lovers, given, of course, the appropriate conditions. Two years ago they were very keen to kill; what's happened in the meantime isn't that their conscience has awakened but that their bottoms have got damp with sitting in wet places. If you set them free it might well be that they wouldn't kill exactly those whom they are supposed to be killing now. It's possible even that they'd take a splendid holiday with loving wives at their side and peaceful little lambs in the meadows. But the time will come and they'll start firing again, for the trenches are far from being a school of altruism or a breeding-ground of Tolstoyans. To pick up a rifle is easy enough and the training's fairly simple—you went through it yourself, remember?—but to put it down again's quite impossible. The best you can do is put it in a corner for an hour or two. The

frightful century is only just beginning. In 1914, when they shouted "Long live the war" (and it is still living, thank you very much), that war was something outside themselves, an historic act, an affair of State. Now they grumble "Down with the war", but it has already struck root in their peaceful bodies, it's become their own trade. They'll never lose their liking for the job; at most they may change their employer or the cut of their trousers, but no more than that. You have had to learn different interpretations of the term "holy war"; now you must try to learn another lesson: the word "peace" means the after-dinner sleep of anthropophagi, the sharing of loot between bandits, the transfer of military operations to more attractive parts of the world, say from these muddy fields to Unter den Linden or from the Minsk marshes to the Nevsky in Petrograd. In other words, anything you like but peace.'

Thus, in conversation, we reached the scene of recent fighting between the Douaumont and Vaux fortresses. All around lay a veritable desert. Not a single stone had escaped destruction, not a blade of grass remained upright—everything had been transformed into a liquid grey mass pitted with septic-looking shell craters filled with yellowish water. Here and there protruded a human arm or leg attached to a swollen, rotting corpse beneath a thin covering of soil.

'Remember,' said the Teacher, 'remember that the war has given us not only Mr Cool's economic empire but the whole of this great apotheosis.'

'Wait till peace comes,' Mr Cool replied. 'We shall form yet another limited company. A year or two will pass and we shall restore such order here that no one will believe the wild talk of survivors who had once seen this desert.'

'Of course,' said Jurenito, 'this is far from being a fulfilment or a purification of the earth. So long as Mr Cool—so long as any Mr Cool—is alive, there will be towns, brothels, guns, dollars, holy books, in short all the things a decent man needs to pollute any corner of so-called God's earth in 24 hours, let alone in a year. They'll build, they'll sow, they'll bury the dead

a little deeper. The beans'll grow all the better for it. But look! It is as though before your eyes the curtain of a distant future age were momentarily pierced. That vision is the prototype of the last, the fiery baptismal font.'

The next day, despite protests from Monsieur Delet who had suddenly become extremely cautious, we went forward once more, this time to Hill 384. When we had reached the first line of trenches, the German guns suddenly opened concerted fire along the whole front. There was no possibility of getting back to the rear. We crawled into an excellently equipped dugout and, listening to the roar of exploding shells, turned with redoubled passion to our favourite occupation of running down the war. Monsieur Delet, though he did not seem to share our views, remained tactfully silent; ever since Ercole had expressed approval of the ill-mannered *poilus'* behaviour he preferred not to adopt any position but only to repeat amiably: 'Tolerance, my friends, tolerance and broadmindedness above all things!'

The Teacher, however, spoke out resolutely against us and began to defend the war.

'Once you've started out you must keep going. If you're very uncomfortable you've got to go more quickly, that's all. Never look back, never remember how warm it was by the fireside, how the wind howled in the chimney—Dickens style—or how there was once a dish of sweets on the table, complete with silver tongs. Cowards! You're no true children of this iron age, you're crinoline-chasers, romantics choking on the saliva of cheap emotion, scavengers of yesterday's well-being. You ask what good the war has done? It's given a good crack on the head to all those who had been asleep too long. That's the first thing. Secondly, it's added a healthy dose of strychnine to what you call the springs of inspiration and what I prefer to describe as mud baths. The past has become an impossibility. However hard men may try to restore your Parthenons according to memory, faded photographs and the toothless mumbling of old men, they'll come out looking like Noah's Ark or like a

lavatory of the 21st century. You say you don't care for the 21st century? I agree it isn't any too attractive, but at any rate it's better than the 19th; it's coarse and businesslike, it despises hypocrisy and refuses to declaim Shelley and Verlaine between two swinish acts. And, besides, it's in the future—the 30th, the 50th or the 100th, but anyhow the happy age—and anything that brings us closer to it even by one step is a blessing.

'You curse the war, yet it's not merely a step, it's a leap into the future. It killed all the things in whose name it was begun and has given birth to all it should have killed. A war of liberation, was it? Yet we see now that the peoples are ripe for the great, the undisguised enslavement, for they could no longer bear the fiction of freedom or its spectral boons.

'War will elevate the spirit! It will make an end of rotten materialism! bawled the philosophers, and not only they, but also nice ordinary people with a tendency to dream owing to their stoutness. But the war was conducted with the help of the material, the *thing*. It opened everyone's eyes to the *thing's* meaning and power. In destroying a thousand *things*, annihilating matter with matter, men have learned to respect the *thing* as such, they have come to love it as they never could in the happy days of peace. Hoping that their hour had come, the venerable representatives of all religious cults have come crawling out with their long-neglected wares; the glories of life beyond the grave. But the war has cheated them cruelly. The nearer men have come to the destruction of real everyday life—their own and other people's—the more it attracts them.

'War is the hatred of nation for nation. Yet no sermons about brotherhood, no books, no travels—travels indeed! why, no transmigrations of whole peoples—have brought them closer, welded them more firmly together, destroyed the frontiers more permanently than these years in the trenches. Another of war's jokes: everything's topsy-turvy, don't you see? It has turned out that all—French and English, Germans and Russians—are extraordinarily alike in hating and loving, being afraid, wielding bayonets, suffering in trenches, gasping out their last

breath and rotting in the ground. Now they've all sat side by side long enough to become aware of it. So long as one played the mandolin and the other went hunting the bear it seemed there was a difference. Perhaps it's true; the bear is nearer and dearer than the tinkling mandolin-player to the Russian heart. But send them out to do one and the same job and it becomes obvious that they're not merely twins but identical twins, except that one may have a wart below the shoulder-blade whereas the other suffers from attacks of the hiccups.

'Another thing: of all people it was the champions of the old hierarchy, of divine disparity and elevating struggle, of unlimited personality in all its aspects, who put their greatest hopes in the war: the emperor isn't a day-labourer, Rothschild isn't a beggar, the poet isn't a manufacturer of toilet paper, the philosopher isn't a shepherd and so forth. Another disappointment: take away the ermine robes, the dress coats and the collars, put them all in trenches such as this, where you'll find no poems about the Virgin, no toilet paper and no pragmatism, however hard you try, and everyone turns out to be exactly alike, so much so that you could mistake the one for the other. Of course there are epaulettes, headquarters, the gracious home front and the rest of it. But what we're after for the moment isn't the essence but a tiny demonstration. Take these unidentified corpses sticking out of the ground. Your sixteen classes of dead men may become muddled up, Monsieur Delet, and what will happen then?

'All this I see, and when you curse war I bless it as the first day of typhoid fever after which man will either be reborn or die, leaving the earth free for new swinishness or for triumphant legions of rats, ants and infusoria.'

I clearly remember this lesson of Jurenito's. We heard it with deep attention, forgetting the danger which threatened us. The roar of artillery, the rattle of machine-guns and the howling of men seemed to confirm the Teacher's inexorable words, and I believe that if death had come to us at that moment in the shape of a good-sized splinter of a heavy shell we should all—



even Monsieur Delet and Ercole, who of us all were most attached to life—have met it with due resignation.

When the Teacher stopped speaking a sinister calm descended all around. Nothing could be heard but a few odd rifle shots. We decided to crawl out and try to make our way back. But when we got over the top we were awaited by something more terrible than shells. As soon as we saw daylight we froze into immobility: before us stood German soldiers armed with hand-grenades. 'At them!' cried one, but another objected: 'They must be very big nobs, let's take them to divisional Headquarters for questioning, plenty of time to shoot them later'. Having convinced themselves that we were unarmed, the Germans marched us away through a long series of corridors and craters, shoving us forward with their rifle-butts to instil greater respect. Poor Aysha particularly enraged them, and they kept saying they would be glad to finish us off with their bayonets because we were not soldiers but spies. There was nothing to hope for, and we involuntarily slowed down our pace despite the blows, realising that this journey was our last.

We were already passing the second line of German trenches. Everything we saw reminded us of the old familiar sights: big cauldrons of soup were carried past, someone was writing a postcard, a group of soldiers were playing cards. I remembered the Teacher's words about the newly-won kinship. Yet, though they might be our kin, they were about to kill us. I looked enviously at a soldier with a red moustache who sat by a camp-fire with his shirt off searching for lice. To live as he was living, to crouch on your heels, to drink a muddy liquid out of a tin mug, then to go to sleep in the midst of filth: how little that was, and yet how much!

I do not know what the Teacher and my other friends did during that half-hour or how they felt on their way to certain death. I came to only at the threshold of a small peasant hut. A German pushed me roughly into a dark, narrow room. A candle stood on the table. I saw a general's epaulettes and a pair of calm, absolutely dispassionate eyes. I understood that

there was no salvation and, taking advantage of the fact that the Teacher was still with us, I silently kissed his shoulder, saying good-bye to the cruellest and most beloved thing my short and messy life had ever known.

## CHAPTER XXI | The labours of Schmidt- a certain Krüger and bread and sausage

ANYONE INCLINED to believe that there is a hidden meaning to life's merry-go-round, its lucky absurdities and desperate chances, will doubtless find food for thought in this story. Almost every month we fell into mortal peril, yet always there would be a 'but' to save us, were it a fishing ketch, a deputy's visiting card or Monsieur Delet's good-humoured laughter. The percentage of our lucky escapes is considerably higher than that of miraculous cures at Lourdes and similar places, so that I could easily be led to speculate on the powers of Providence, particularly when, instead of the firing squad and the general's eyes, we were confronted with a pair of eyes which belonged to Schmidt and a bottle of cognac, though it was only *ersatz*. However, elevated thoughts are not in my line. I have been in the habit of hanging my head from childhood; I look up at the sky only when I hear the whirr of an aeroplane or when I am wondering whether to wear a mackintosh. The rest of the time I look down at my feet, i.e. at the dirty trampled snow, at puddles, fag-ends and gobbets of spit. It may be that this peculiarity of my, alas, already ossified spine explains my fondness for things of a base and graceless nature. In short, there are about 55 million Germans. If the chances of winning at roulette are 1:36, the difference between that and 1:55,000,000 is merely quantitative and it's a long way from that to mysticism.

Schmidt recognised us at once, though he himself, sunburnt and mature-looking in his spiked helmet, had little in common with the poor young Stuttgart student of yore. I never succeeded in ascertaining his rank or the exact nature of his duties. From his words we gathered that he had gained promotion in the first

few months of the war and now played an important role both at home and, particularly, at the front.

After reassuring us with regard to our fate, Schmidt said he had eighteen minutes at his disposal, which he would gladly devote to talking with us. The Teacher questioned him about his current occupations.

'They are very complicated,' said Schmidt. 'The war has taken a somewhat different turn from what I had expected. It is perfectly clear that we shall not be able to conquer the whole of Europe and put it in order in this one go. Hence certain intermediate tasks have arisen, such as colonising Russia and destroying Britain and France as thoroughly as possible, so as to have less trouble in organising them later on. Those are the general considerations; now let us turn to particulars. We shall soon be obliged, for strategic reasons, to evacuate a largish piece of Picardy; it may be that we shall not return there, and it is already evident that we shall not annex it. I am therefore preparing for the scientific destruction of that country. The task requires meticulous attention. All the local industries have to be investigated: a soap factory at Ham—blow it up; Chauny is famous for its pears—cut down all the trees; excellent dairies in the vicinity of St Quentin—transport the cattle to Germany, and so forth. The place must be left completely bare. If this could be done all the way to Marseilles and the Pyrenees I should be happy: the most painless, humane and rapid transition to German rule, which in turn is only a step towards the organisation of a unified economy within the Reich and thus towards the happiness of all mankind.'

'This is barbarism!' Alexey Spiridonovich cried. 'I've killed one Negro and have become the unhappiest man on earth. Yet you mean to kill millions of innocent people! You speak of the happiness of mankind and sink the children in the *Lusitania*, destroy ancient cathedrals, burn down cities. We won't let you colonise Russia. We shall come out against your infernal machines with ikons and prayers. And you will fall!'

'Do you think all of us Germans like killing? I assure you

that it's far more pleasant to drink beer or this cognac and go to a concert or even to my old friend Frau Hase. No, killing is an unpleasant necessity. A dirty business without enthusiastic cries and without festive bonfires. I don't think the surgeon finds it particularly appetising or jolly to thrust his fingers into a belly inflated with gas and undigested food. But there's no choice. I, my family, my town, my country, humanity itself are only steps. Between killing one weak-minded old man and ten million people for the good of mankind there's only an arithmetical difference. Yet killed they must be, or else the whole world will continue on its stupid, senseless way. Others will be born instead of the ones we kill. I love children no less than you do—let me remind you that I went so far as to trample a bed of flowers in the park in Stuttgart in protest against an order of things which condemned a baby to starvation. That's precisely why, if it should be necessary for the success of a campaign today—which means for the good of Germany tomorrow and of humanity the day after—to sink all the *Lusitanias* and send hundreds of thousands of human beings to their death, I would not hesitate for an instant. Having said that, is it worth while even to mention the cities, churches and so on? Though it's a pity about them, of course.

'In particular let me tell you that one of the gun batteries which smashed Rheims was commanded by Professor Schneider, the author of some magnificent works on the history of Gothic architecture. After gazing through his field glasses at the cathedral which he had longed to see for so many years, Herr Schneider wept. Then he gave orders on the line of fire. As for me, you know that I detest everything that's old in principle. It'll be better if they build a factory or a barracks. We can't spend all our lives snivelling over grandmother's old trunk and going about in torn clothes.

'As for Russia, I've already heard of your queer custom of coming out with ikons against machine-guns, and I am inclined to attribute it to the poor development of schools and railways in your country. But don't despair, we'll put things right. I'm

very fond of you, Herr Tishin, but when we come to Russia you'll have to forget your sighing and weeping and get down to serious business—agronomy or poultry-breeding. The ikons we shall transfer to a museum, and the prayers we shall publish for the benefit of scholars interested in folklore.

'I assume this will all take place quite soon. Meanwhile you'll have to spend a little time in one of our concentration camps. There you'll see German organisation and German culture with your own eyes.'

There were still two minutes left and Alexey Spiridonovich—who had torn off his tie in excitement—as well as Monsieur Delet wanted to argue with Schmidt. But at that moment two sentries came into the room bringing a young soldier with them.

It turned out that this soldier, a private called Krüger, had received a letter informing him that his wife was at death's door. Having no hope of obtaining leave he had attempted to escape, but had been caught near Headquarters.

'I fully understand your feelings,' said Schmidt to Krüger, 'and would be most glad to help you to see your wife at once, but that would be conducive to further attempts at desertion and would thus lower the efficiency of our armed forces. Therefore, for the sake of your own children or, if you have none, for the children of Germany, you will have to die in ten minutes' time. You may hand your belongings and a letter to your wife to the officer on duty.' Having said this and signed a paper, Schmidt quickly took his leave and drove away in a waiting car.

We were taken into a little garden where we were supposed to wait for the arrival of a batch of prisoners captured during the fighting in order to proceed eastwards together with them. After a few minutes Krüger was led out of the house. He walked in a calm, ordinary manner, as though undergoing training or on parade. The soldiers on duty were summoned. They were eating bread and sausage at the time and drinking coffee. After wiping his lips with his hand, the sergeant ordered: 'Form ranks!' Krüger was stood up against the wall of a barn.

A dog belonging to the farm ran up to him but soon went away with its tail between its legs. A batman out in the street was grooming an unsaddled horse with a curry comb.

It was a quiet, simple, everyday scene. I glanced at Krüger; he was looking now at his feet, now at the sky, now down the road, as if expecting an impossible reprieve to appear from one of these directions. The sergeant shouted. The first salvo was unsuccessful and Krüger, wounded in the lower part of the abdomen, jumped in the air squealing. Another salvo. The sergeant went up to the corpse solicitously and touched the head with his foot to make sure of the result. Then two soldiers dragged the corpse aside and went back to their half-eaten bread and sausage. You could hear someone dictating indoors: 'No. 4812 . . . Krüger Hans . . . 4.15 p.m.'

'Teacher,' I whispered, 'what is this? Can one ever forget it?'

He had talked very fluently, had Herr Schmidt, but arithmetic wasn't all there was to it. Even if you accepted the fact, there still remained the 'how'. Was it not better to kill every man on earth in anger, in blind rage for the sake of one's own or one's mistress's stupid, personal happiness than to destroy a single Krüger—a Krüger whom, perhaps, nobody needed—against a barn wall at 4.15 p.m. after calm deliberation, for the sake of the salvation of mankind?

'Remember it, remember it well,' said Jurenito. 'Remember the brains spattered on the wall and the neat slices of sausage. Let them arise before your eyes if ever, exhausted, you should stretch out a hand to bless the shame and filth of this earth.'

That night, locked in a stuffy goods truck going we knew not where, I suddenly saw the whole scene of the deserter's killing once more clearly before my eyes. But let me confess and speak frankly: my feeling then was not one of loathing but rather a horrid, gloating satisfaction at the thought that not I but someone else had stood against the barn wall, that I was alive, enjoying the warmth of the stale air heated by the breathing of men, that I could light a pipe or doze off leaning against the

shoulder of plump Mr Cool. I did not confess this to the Teacher, but I knew that this tedious, blind desire for life—no matter where, be it in a pigsty—prevented me from putting his high teaching into practice. This thought tormented me all night until, towards morning, I understood that weakness was not yet perdition—that Peter's anything but admirable night by the camp-fire had not hindered his saintly death—and, murmuring: 'I deny thee, but only temporarily', I fell asleep.



## CHAPTER XXII | Order and culture of the great Reich—we are welcomed in revolutionary Petrograd

WE WERE TAKEN to Oberlahnstein camp on the little river Lahn. On our very first day there we were visited by a middle-aged lieutenant. He told us that Germany was fighting for culture, justice, freedom and the rights of small nations. This was so much like what we had heard daily in the Allied countries that I wondered whether the German, by quoting slogans he had picked up in *Le Matin*, was not trying to pass himself off as a friend of the Allies and provoke us into speaking too freely. But the Teacher explained that 'culture', 'freedom' and the rest were also very much in fashion here, and that the officer had almost certainly read about them, not in *Le Matin*, but in the *Deutsche Zeitung*. Then the lieutenant asked whether there were among us any Russians who weren't Russians (i.e. Ukrainians), English who weren't English (i.e. Irish) or Frenchmen who weren't French (i.e. extreme left-wing socialists). None such were to be found, but the German, concealing his disappointment, promised us nevertheless that we should have every opportunity of appreciating the culture and order of the Great Reich in the camp.

The lieutenant was followed by an N.C.O., who ordered us to fall in. Mr Cool's paunch, Ercole's arms, my round shoulders and, finally, the whole of Monsieur Delet protruded from the ranks. The N.C.O. was displeased and gave Mr Cool a violent jab in the belly, but on hearing that he was an American muttered something resembling an apology and immediately boxed the ears of Alexey Spiridonovich, whose front and rear were irreproachable. I could never understand this trick, which eventually became a habit: whenever our keepers were angry with the Teacher, Mr Cool or Monsieur Delet, they would punish Alexey Spiridonovich, Aysha or me.

After these exercises we were each given a bowl of foul-coloured liquid containing potato peel (the potatoes had, no doubt, been prepared according to the method advocated by Schmidt on a previous occasion).

Then began, day by day, our gradual initiation into the secrets of the culture and order of the Reich. Mr Cool was able to convince himself at once that his dollars had not lost their magic power. By virtue of those dollars, he and Monsieur Delet received an excellent diet and shortly afterwards became only nominal inmates of the camp, moving to the house of Frau Knabe, the senior N.C.O.'s wife, who kept something in the nature of a family boarding-house for prisoners of good social standing. Monsieur Delet complained only of the heaviness of the food—which meant a double dose of Pink pills every day—and of little Ännchen, who was as clumsy as the *Deutschland* statue and did not know even the simplest of Lucie's tricks. But the rest of us, doomed to the eternal slops and peel, grew so weak within a month that we could hardly walk and only got up from the ground for roll-call.

However, we were able to comfort ourselves with the knowledge that similar conditions existed outside the camp. A soldier told me that his wife had had so little to eat during pregnancy that the baby had been born without hair, without nails and an obvious idiot. Yet Herr Löwen, supply chief in the same town of Bieberich, ate a whole turkey every day. I don't know whether Schmidt was aware of this; judging by the fact that it was only French orchards that he destroyed and that he was full of praise for all the Herr Löwens and for German organisation in general, I suppose that the story of the soldier's baby had not reached his ears.

The situation was equally depressing where culture was concerned. One day Aysha, in the infinite' innocence of his heart, told a German sentry how he had pulled out the teeth of dead enemies because the 'gri-gri' protected him against the evil spirit—the gun—and advised the German to do likewise. Whereupon the Germans gave Aysha a merciless beating—

breaking his pride and joy, the Ultima arm—and were going to shoot him, but changed their minds and set about photographing him instead, and exhibiting him to various Swedes and Dutchmen as an example of cruelty and barbarism. They would lead him politely into the yard, reel off long explanations to gentlemen in top hats, and measure his head; then, when the distinguished visitors had gone, they would fling him, with kicks and curses, into a dark shed. My poor, tender-hearted Aysha, you did not realise that on those occasions your barbarian nature was meant to throw into relief the culture and humanness of your tormentors! You did not even know the meaning of that strange word 'culture'; when they stared at you, you would smile shyly, and when they beat you, you sobbed loudly, like a child.

Ercole, after losing a good deal of weight, stole a few potatoes from the kitchens, for which he was sent to the camp prison and also beaten. Alexey Spiridonovich was in poor health all the time; his liver trouble, contracted in Africa, had led to complications. He was exceedingly depressed, and hesitated between three possible courses of action: hanging himself, becoming an out-and-out Tolstoyan—which would mean forgiving his tormentors all and perhaps even inviting the sergeant to beat him to death—or changing his name to Tishenko and being moved to the Ukrainians' camp, where conditions were considerably better. He could not make up his mind and went sick as the best way out. I moaned together with him, cursed culture, wrote all the things that a Russian poet writes under such circumstances — 'Russia — Messiah — devil — resurrection — Russian—prayer—sweetness—stench'—and read my work aloud to Alexey Spiridonovich. He clutched his head, yelled: 'Yes, yes, She comes!', then buried his face in his pillow and cried all night. But I, not knowing how to weep, would either write more verse or sit down opposite a Frenchman who often received food parcels from home and stare at his mouth with all the prophetic frenzy at my command until, driven to despair, he would cut me off a tiny slice of bacon.

The Teacher showed no outward or inward reaction to order and culture. As a Mexican citizen he could have insisted on his release or, at the least, moved to Frau Knabe's *pension*, but he would not leave us. He studied gymnastics, the Gwanza and Herero languages, the development of the sugar-beet industry in the Ukraine and various past attempts to establish State monopolies in the West.

I was greatly impressed by Jurenito's adaptability to the most incongruous living conditions. He was a gourmet of exquisite taste, an honorary member of the *Gargantuans' Club* in Paris, a connoisseur of Burgundy and Bordeaux wines, an expert buyer at the sales of famous cellars, yet he fed with appetite on the unspeakable slops served at the camp and managed to stay brisk, healthy and cheerful. Similarly, he remained unmoved by insults; his attitude towards them was one of frank interest, like that of a traveller studying the customs of a country, or rather, that of a Brehm outside a zoo cage. In fact, however, he was undoubtedly preoccupied by his own thoughts and plans which he did not communicate to us. It is true he often chatted with me, but usually about matters of no importance, to practise his Russian, as he himself admitted.

At the beginning of February a new ordeal began: all of us, including Mr Cool and Monsieur Delet, were unexpectedly transferred from the camp to the eastern front near Kovno and put to roadmending there. This was excessively hard work and I am convinced that, had not various things happened which we could not then foresee, all of us except the Teacher would have found peace in a matter of a month or two, a peace by no means romantic but all the more permanent for that.

About three weeks after our arrival the Germans decorated their Headquarters with flags and joyfully congratulated us: 'There's been a revolution in Russia. The Tsar has abdicated'. How shall I describe our feelings on that day, Alexey Spiridonovich's tears and embraces, my uproarious singing, Monsieur Delet's fears and the Teacher's pleasure and satisfaction?

The next day, when we had finished levelling that hopeless

road, Jurenito gathered us together and said: 'My friends, I want you to prepare yourselves to take leave of the delights of culture. We are about to undertake a small move to the East. I can assure you that the same potato peelings will be served there in a much more ingenious and entertaining manner. The tide of war is swelling beyond the narrow confines of military fronts: in a terrible flood which threatens to break through all the dams, it is trying to wash away the granite, the solid bedrock of the world. Believe me, in savage Petrograd men are now destroying and building the Parthenons, the Quisisanas, the Arcopolises of the universe.'

We did not fully grasp the precise meaning of the Teacher's words but, nevertheless, we began to make energetic preparations for escape. A month passed before we were able to execute our plan, but on the 7th of April, disguised in German uniforms (Aysha with his head completely swathed in bandages), we were making our way towards the forward positions.

What we saw there bore no resemblance to war. No one was firing. From the direction of the Russian trenches came the strains of the *Internationale*, and red banners could be seen bearing such inscriptions as 'Brothers, come over to our side!' 'Long live peace!'. We freely crossed the space separating the Russian from the German trenches and beheld an extraordinary spectacle. A detachment of Germans was marching in full order. An officer snapped a command: 'Eyes right! Kiss the Russians!' and the German soldiers proceeded to embrace the nearest bearded, broad-faced fellows from Perm and Vyatka, who grunted with joy, crossed themselves and shed tears. In the meantime other Germans carefully inspected the positions and clicked their cameras 'for a souvenir'. The embraces dutifully performed, the Germans opened a small but efficient market on the spot, exchanging cardboard cigarette-cases, pocket torches which wouldn't light, and a disgusting liquid bearing the proud name of *cognac* for soap, tea, bacon, sugar and other produce from the country of the savages. This process was described as 'fraternising'.

comrade here said about the spirit, first of all the reservists ought to be sent home, and then we've got to do something about the market gardeners, I mean, they've got no conscience, potatoes at five roubles a pound, whoever heard of such a thing!' ('Inform the Government! Comrade, speak about the Universe! Let the representative of the proletariat have his say!')

Then a concert artist sang the *Song of the Toreador*. A girl student read *The Muse of the People's Wrath*, with feeling, out of a book. Shouts from the back rows: 'We've been swindled. Where's the Mexican?'

The Teacher: 'If I could only see as far as tomorrow and did not know how to turn the leaves of the calendar, I would say that you're the world's greatest reactionaries. Thanks to God—' ('down with the priests!') '—and the war, the freedom about which you're all speaking has been relegated to the archives. But you are not living, you are tossing in a fever; your delirium is not the memory of something which was never yours, it is a glimpse into a distant future. I salute your madness, your ravings, your senseless resolutions and this circus arena where so religiously, in such deadly earnest, you are turning somersaults before the astounded eyes of Europe'.

Bewilderment. Silence. The general happy mood was disturbed. Then an old peasant woman of unspeakable appearance, wearing a spotted shawl, a single tooth protruding from her mouth, got up and mumbled: 'Such a dream I've had, little fathers! There was this great big cockroach, you see, and it ate a whole potful of jam and then it crawled right under Father Mihail's behind and it threw him off his chair with those great whiskers it had. Did you ever? The only thing it can mean is, somebody has it in mind to seize the throne'.

Shouting. Upstairs the fighting had already begun. As ill-luck would have it, Ercole, enchanted by the spectacle, wanted to show his mettle. He slid down quickly on to the sand and turned head over heels. It was not meant as an allegorical gesture, just a beautiful trick worthy of Bambucci the Roman. A terrible noise broke out. Indignation everywhere. 'Agent

*provocateur!* 'Who's an *agent provocateur?*' 'Death to the *agent provocateur!*' The back rows pressed forward. Ercole was in danger. It turned out, however, that the *agent provocateur* wasn't he but some gentleman in a felt hat. No, the gentleman was a deputy Minister and a comrade. A resolution was put to the vote. Alas, Ercole was not yet satisfied. He let off some squibs which he had had the forethought to bring along. 'They're shooting!' Panic. We only just managed to get away. Somebody protested: 'Comrade, you entirely lack social consciousness. You've trodden right on the baby's head'.

I was vexed that our meeting should have broken up in such a way, but the same Socialist Revolutionary again made reference to tradition. The Teacher, on the other hand, was wholly satisfied by the stormy evening and decided to make meetings his speciality; he organised dozens of them under various titles and for persons of all categories.

I particularly remember three meetings: one for thieves, one for prostitutes and one for Government Ministers. A representative of one of the ministries, another Socialist Revolutionary—incidentally a very moneyed gentleman, a wholesaler in the coffee trade—tried to convince the thieves that, in the first place, private property was, of course, theft—as Proudhon had said long ago—but that, secondly, stealing was wrong and everybody should work honestly for defence. The thieves disagreed, invoked the hardships and responsibilities of their profession, adopted a trade union constitution and decided to issue a protest against double locks on front doors, which interfered with the freedom of citizens. The evening ended in uproar: the Socialist Revolutionary noticed the disappearance of his wallet containing a quantity of pounds sterling, began to shout at the top of his voice: 'Thieves, scoundrels, to prison with the lot of you!' and called for the militia. However, the militiaman who arrived towards morning declared that he must first ask his committee, and the Socialist Revolutionary, remembering the Tsarist police longingly for the first time, went off to the next meeting.

Alexey Spiridonovich had his chance to talk at the prostitutes' meeting. He recalled Sonechka Marmeladova and Mary the Egyptian, asked for forgiveness, forgave everybody in his turn, told the story of his life, and finally invited the meeting to 'purify themselves' in the waters of the revolution and to occupy themselves with knitting pants for the 'gallant defenders of freedom and the motherland'. Many wept. Later several citizenesses called for a raising of tariffs. Alexey Spiridonovich tried to speak again, burst into tears from excess of emotion and was led away by a kind-hearted sister of Mary the Egyptian, who whispered in his ear: 'Darling comrade, you're ever so sweet'.

The meeting of Government Ministers was particularly crowded, the invitation having been extended to past, present and future Ministers. Since the office was a shortlived one and anyone could expect it to fall to him to be a Minister one of these days, not less than two thousand people turned up at the circus. A meeting of the Government was cancelled for the occasion. All the Ministers, even the future ones, expressed contrition and promised that, when they were Ministers, they would not be like other Ministers. Their speeches were highly lyrical, all about the sea, sunsets, rusty chains, keys to people's hearts and so on. As a rule I'm dreadfully afraid of Ministers, but these weren't frightening at all and I felt as if I were in the company of young, inexperienced poets. I even plucked up sufficient courage to pronounce the following speech: 'Citizens, during the ten years of my wanderings through Europe I have done some horrible jobs. I have had to shave poodles, push trolleys full of doubtful china and act as cashier in one of my friend Mr Cool's brothels. But here's my word of honour that I've never been a Minister and never shall be one. I am generally fond of human beings and you in particular strike me as very nice people indeed. Let me advise you, too, to do something different. You all seem to have a bent for poetry and I'm sure you would be capable of writing advertising copy for cigarettes or describing the beauties of country



life in *Russia's Riches*. Long live pure poetry!' I was enthusiastically applauded.

After these meetings and some newspaper articles the Teacher's merits came to be appreciated by all. He was appointed Supreme Commissar, though he never found out precisely of what, as the signatory to the decree, hurrying to a meeting, failed to complete it, saying for the Teacher's comfort that somebody somewhere would sort things out.

About the middle of the summer—I cannot say why—I stopped being jubilant and turned to another occupation, that of worrying. This, too, took up a lot of time. I worried in the mornings as I stood in queues or read the papers, at conferences during the day and at meetings in the evenings. At night I would walk along the crowded Nevsky. Everyone was out for a stroll—officers, sailors, Ministers, prostitutes, speculators, Socialist Revolutionaries, ordinary citizens—and everyone, like me, was worried. Every night somebody would try to seize power but would eventually change his mind and put it off till later, and the thing would end with a slight skirmish. Thousands of bearded soldiers would come rushing from the railway stations, knocking over ladies—who fell into a swoon anyhow at the mere sight of them—and charming 'land hussars' who tried to persuade the bearded ones to go back to the front 'for land and freedom'. In the expensive restaurants, where we were sometimes invited by Mr Cool, the waiters still bowed from the waist. Rumanian allies twanged and tinkled their instruments ('here, you, Rumanian front, let's have that again, the one about the girlie'), Irroy's cold punch foamed in the jugs, and the diners, after rummaging in their wallets, would produce three-rouble notes and throw them with a broad gesture into the collecting box for St George's cavaliers ('let's hope they help the General to get rid of all this scum'). After one of these dinners we could starve for three days almost without noticing it. Our money didn't go far enough even to buy bread.

All my friends were worried too: Monsieur Delet because

the Russians were not attacking; Schmidt because they were planning to attack; Mr Cool couldn't bear the financial panic; Ercole had used up all the squibs in Petrograd and there were no new deliveries; and Aysha got beaten, out on the islands, by some drunken waiters who took him either for the devil or for a member of the Black Hundreds, so that he was now afraid to go out into the streets.

Alexey Spiridonovich was more agitated than anyone else. He was on the point of enrolling in the 'death battalion' and going off to save the motherland, but for one reason and another changed his mind at the last minute.

It was necessary to join a party or at least to vote for a particular list of candidates in the elections to the City Duma. But the right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries were too left for him and the left-wing Populists were too right. He worried, sighed and—after drinking plenty of cold punch—wept on Mr Cool's shoulder: 'The twelfth hour will soon strike; Russia is about to perish! And here am I, drinking cold punch. A fine citizen I am, a fine son of the motherland! Come, redemption! Come, torments of the Cross! Oh, oh!'

Then the German offensive started. Schmidt rejoiced and treated Alexey Spiridonovich—who by now did not weep but sobbed—to Riga kümme! Monsieur Delet threatened: 'Just you wait, I'll pack my things and go. You'll see how Russia gets on without me!'. On the Nevsky there was still more rushing about, singing, swearing and shooting. Finally a solemn gala meeting in honour of free Liberia was announced, and Aysha was persuaded to be a native of that republic instead of Senegal. However, he had no regrets on that score. He was put in the place of honour and every attention was lavished upon him. A lady made a speech about Harriet Beecher Stowe and advised the Russians, 'those pitiful mutinous slaves', to follow somebody's example, though she did not make it completely clear whose—Harriet Beecher Stowe's or the Negroes'. A professor who was a left-wing Cadet strongly advised Aysha to introduce the system of proportional representation in Liberia

and even offered his collaboration. In the end a long-haired youth came forward and began to shout: 'The main thing is to end the serfdom of the spirit, to introduce Futurism into life. If you, O Liberian, are an adulterer, a murderer, a bandit, I love you. We shall smear our faces with soot and glorify the primitivism of the future. Tonight come one and all to Tenishevsky School to a lecture on *The Navel and Something* with practical demonstrations'.

When we left the hall where this celebration had taken place, I suggested that we should immediately go to the Futurist lecture, but the Teacher said: 'I'm sick of that. Anyway, my friends, tonight I shall disappear, though of course only for a time. We shall soon meet again.

'Look at these frightened, anxious, desperate streets. Every stone, every snotty-nosed phiz cries to high heaven: "Away with freedom, it is heavier than the yoke, it is too much for us". Is freedom conceivable without perfect harmony? It quickly transforms itself into disguised enslavement. I become free by oppressing another. It doesn't take long to learn not to allow yourself to be crushed, but iron ages of a new, unheard-of art of living are needed to lose the will to crush others. Don't be taken in by the beautiful fables and the nostalgic sighs for Hellas. History has laid its conjuror's cloak over the wise and free philosopher whose privy was cleaned out by a perfectly ordinary slave. Laugh when you are told of the divine hierarchy of India or the freedom of the independent Britons. All these are merely poetic formulations of a single truth. Freedom does not exist and has never existed. One way or another, despite everything, Epictetus still wanted to eat. The laws were written first and, whatever poetic nonsense Ehrenburg may talk, he still walks on two legs, enjoys a good dinner, isn't indifferent to women and so forth. Thousands of different religions, dogmas, philosophical systems, laws, are merely expressions of that which exists.

'What humanity is heading for today is by no means paradise but the harshest, blackest, sweatiest purgatory of all. The

final twilight of freedom is at hand. Assyria and Egypt will be exceeded by this new, unheard-of slavery. But the slave-galleys are a preparatory stage, a token of liberty—not the liberty of the statue in the square, not of the penny-a-liner's hackneyed idea, but of created liberty, faultless in its equilibrium, the *ne plus ultra* of harmony. You may ask why we had to have that backward or sideways step, those aimless months of madness. They were a good object lesson. What we have today is a mirage—the bearded ruffians at the stations and the “land hussars”, the queues and Iroy's cold punch, Shchukin's Picasso and everybody's stupid, dull-witted “What's that you say?” But the day will come when it will be the truth. It is impossible, it is necessary. Freedom that has not fed on blood, that has been picked up in the street or handed out as a tip, is at its last gasp. But remember—I am telling you this today, when thousands of hands are stretching out for the stick, and millions voluptuously prepare their backs for the beating—a day will come when no one will need the stick any longer. A distant day! Meanwhile, *au revoir*.’

## Everything upside down— Monsieur Delet suffers a mental breakdown

WE WERE LEFT ALONE in that fictitious city which—according to absolutely accurate information supplied by all Russian authors—is in reality non-existent.

At night I wandered about the straight, flat streets. There, in identical low-built houses, lived shady officials giving birth to Antichrist himself between two 'Out' trays—incidentally without any labour pains at all, merely getting their fingers stained with ink; Finnish or possibly German tailors of amazing neatness, with starched wives, who drank kummel on holidays and then measured the sky above St Isaac's Cathedral with their yardsticks and asked the invisible Being up there whether his suit wasn't a little tight under the arms; churchwardens, retired house-porters and coffin-makers who sprinkled their fuchsias and geraniums with some kind of muck and then lifted their floorboards in search, perhaps of a dead rat, perhaps of a hidden three-rouble note, perhaps of the navel of the earth: in a word, all the famous characteristic rubbish of St Petersburg. Unexpectedly, out of the dirty cottonwool of fog, a huge square building would loom up, with blank walls, a lift stuck forever between the fifth and sixth floors and a typewriter tapping out tediously, to the point of toothache: 'Save Russia, save Russia!'

Dull, troubled crowds gathered for days on end outside the white projection screens of the newspaper offices. The thing distinctly smelt of Belshazzar, but instead of *tekel* and the other normal words, what one read on the screens was pure delirium: 'New cabinet in Spain—Chernov appointed Resettlement Minister—smoke Kri-Kri cigarettes'. I would test the pavement of the Nevsky, and it did not give way; the Admiralty needle,

flow, but I whimpered long and dutifully, like a dog in dirty weather.

I was born in 1891, went to the First Gymnasium in Moscow and, being still a junior schoolboy, made the following entries in my *Tovarishch* diary: 'Your favourite author?—Dostoyevsky. Your favourite hero?—Archpriest Avvakum'. How was I not to lament and not to whimper? My habits were already formed; even at table I despised base matter. Somewhere inside me there was a core of dyed-in-the-wool chauvinism; most of the time I would be living abroad and everything would seem to be all right, and then suddenly it would seize me like a fit: 'At home in Russia everything's special, we even slit bellies in a special way'. Normally, I think, I preferred it when there was no slitting of bellies, but every now and again, in some cosy café in Copenhagen, there I'd go again, seeing myself as a Scythian, despising pitiful petty-bourgeois Europe and all the rest of it.

I am giving this boring autobiographical information to explain my state of mind in the autumn of Nineteen Seventeen. I looked back, lamented, wrote poems and read them aloud in numerous 'poets' cafés' with moderate success.

Two months passed in that way. The Teacher gave no sign of life. Instead, one frosty December morning, Monsieur Delet came rushing into my room, flung himself into the armchair and cried: 'I'm dying'. I knew that Frenchmen have an exceptionally delicate physique, so that even at two or three degrees of frost whole droves of people die in Paris of a special *congestion* peculiar to the race. I therefore became alarmed and tried to feel his pulse. But Monsieur Delet snatched away his wrist and declared that, whilst he was in fact unwell and suffering from constipation as never before in his life, that was not the point. The point was Kúzma the house-porter and Russia in general.

I must explain that, being engaged in my lamentations, I had never found time to visit any of my friends; only once, at a 'poets' café', had I run across Alexey Spiridonovich, who, after

hearing my poems, had begun lamenting in his turn, not in the literary sense but with a pocket handkerchief to his eyes. I knew nothing about Monsieur Delet's way of life, so that Kuzma was to me a wholly mysterious individual. I asked Monsieur Delet for the necessary explanation, and he, sobbing and choking with indignation, told me of his misadventures.

When *ces apaches* had first seized power, Monsieur Delet had decided in protest not to go out at all. Appalling for the digestion, but culture comes first. He had been waiting for a delegation to approach him: negotiations, perhaps a compromise. No one came. Indigestion, insomnia. To make matters worse, Monsieur Delet had previously deposited a very special packet of notes in the safe of the *Crédit Lyonnais*. He must leave the house and go there. Would you believe it? The safe gone! The bank gone! Everything gone! Do you hear that? Nothing, only a crowd of people and a terrible row. On the Kuznetsky he had met a general he knew, Pirikin or Ripikin by name. He had hastened to accost him: 'What's to be done, *mon général*?' But the other—all atremble—'Hush, hush! Not *mon général*! That's a thing of the past. Hush!' Do you hear that? Better to neglect one's stomach, better to kill oneself than to walk about in this hell where nothing exists any longer.

But they would not even let him die in peace. Some bandits had come, so evil-looking that in Paris they wouldn't have been allowed even into the prison, saying that henceforth they would live in Monsieur Delet's flat because they were not simply six tramps but—listen to this—Monsieur Delet read aloud: 'a Sub-Group for the Protection of Motherhood and Infants'. All that's very well, but might he ask where he—Monsieur Delet—was to live in that case? Oh the horror, oh the brutality of it! Monsieur Delet squealed and hopped about my room. They had offered him a foul, cramped backroom. What did it mean? The number of cubic metres of air, they had said, was entirely sufficient. Instead of dining-room, drawing-room, hall, bedroom and study—cubic metres of air! Monsieur Delet was a Frenchman, he loved freedom, space, air, even in paintings there had

to be *plein air*, he would suffocate in those cubic metres. But his entreaties had made no impression whatsoever.

Then Monsieur Delet had screwed up his courage for a desperate gesture, a heroic deed. He would go himself to the bandits' den, the District Soviet. And what do you think? There, in the midst of all the other scoundrels, he had seen his own house-porter, Kuzma. Was that not madness? Nevertheless, Monsieur Delet had stood his ground: he was a Frenchman, immunity, *n'est-ce pas*? 'We aren't interested, we've already put away three consuls who'd been up to their tricks. What is your class history?' A ray of hope! Familiar words! The unforgettable sixteen classes! Proudly he had replied: 'Of course I'm not like you—three years in a common grave—class sixteen thanks to my own kind-heartedness! I'm class four, class three, ownership in perpetuity, I could be in the special class, how's that for you?'

'Oh, my dear Ehrenburg, the most dreadful thing has happened to your country, it has turned upside-down. Everything's in a hopeless muddle. I found myself at the bottom of the scale. They turned me out, and Kuzma actually laughed. He said "There, comrade" . . . Oh! Oh! he really said that. ". . . there, Comrade Delet, there's your special class!" Friend, save me! Where's Jurenito, my partner? Where is everybody? I may be dying! I am worn out! For the first time in my life I've lost my appetite, my *élan*, everything. Even Pink pills don't help me any longer. If you were to offer me a dozen real Marenne oysters, a bottle of Chablis, Lucie herself, I wouldn't move a finger. In Petersburg you were always talking about saving something. Now see if you can save Delet!'

These complaints touched me to the quick. I telephoned the newspaper office, the *Trefoil* café and a certain charming actress to say that I wouldn't be lamenting today, and decided to go with Monsieur Delet to look up our friends. Perhaps one of them might be able to help our dying fellow-disciple.

First we went to see Mr Cool, but on the way Monsieur Delet threw one or two more hysterical fits. As soon as we were



out of the front door he rushed towards a wall which every morning was plastered with decrees and insisted that I should translate them for him. He enjoyed this exercise, deriving from it a certain masochistic pleasure. He heard about the mobilisation of agronomists and the census of sewing-machines with equanimity—neither one nor the other affected him in any way—but the third pronouncement made him break out into a loud, unrestrained howl. This was a poem by a young Futurist entitled *Decree* which, in elaborate language bristling with new word-formations, called on the population to transform and beautify their lives, bring out their pictures into the streets and beat drums in the squares. The poem ended with a fierce threat to the effect that the pitiful reactionaries who failed to do these things would die an inglorious death.

‘Oh, damnation! That means I shall be shot tomorrow! Yes, yes, tomorrow—I know. They do everything within 24 hours. Tomorrow at half-past ten in the morning! Oh, what can I do? I’d be glad to bring my picture—*Young Girl dreaming in an Orchard*—out into Zubovskaya Square, but they’ve taken it from me, those bandits for the Protection of Motherhood! I don’t know how to beat a drum. That means the end, death, death without even the undertaker!’ I managed with difficulty to calm him down by explaining that this was only a poem. ‘What? You use that glorious word to describe the ravings of a mad dog? I love poetry! Zizi and I always used to read Hugo or Rostan “before”, to promote *élan*, and Musset or the Comtesse de Noailles “after”, when we were resting. But this—this is a horror, a crime, not a poem!’

In celebration of some holiday or other (ever since I was expelled from school I have lost all interest in saints’ calendars, including revolutionary ones) the streets were hung with posters—futurist, cubist, suprematist, expressionist and others. Selecting one which meant the most to him—it showed an emerald green woman with legs growing out of her breasts and four behinds in different positions, illuminations and interpretations—Monsieur Delet began to sob. ‘Oh art! Oh my dear hunts-

man who filled me with *élan*! Oh beauty! Woman! Love! All is desecrated!’

In this way we reached Teatralnaya Square, where a curious scene met our eyes. A certain Khryashch, by profession a champion wrestler and a ‘Futurist of Living’, who went in for advising young girls how to achieve communion with the sun, was in the process of erecting a monument to himself in the middle of the square. In real life he was a tallish chap with frizzy hair tinted golden with bronze powder, a blank face and splendid biceps. On the statue he was entirely naked, looked more intelligent and stood on one leg, the other pointing in the air. The crowd, thinking he must be a ‘big Bolshevik’, was silent and rather scared. Monsieur Delet sobbed. Then a Red Army man came along, spat on the ground, tipped the statue over and smashed it.

The audience dispersed and we went on to the hotel where Mr Cool was supposed to be staying. Alas, we were informed that the American, as an ‘incorrigible exploiter’, had been sent to a concentration camp near the Simonov Monastery.

‘This is a second deluge!’ cried Monsieur Delet. We decided to go at once to visit poor Mr Cool. We found him in a state of the utmost depression. He was as thin as a rake and had actually grown a beard. Out of sheer boredom he had kept a record of the little diversions of prison life in his cheque-book, which had lost all its charm as a source of mysterious delights: ‘24th. Two pounds of dried fish issued. 27th. Millet for dinner. 29th. Smith the factory-owner got a pound of sugar in a parcel and let me borrow three lumps’. Wishing to comfort Mr Cool I brought him a large illustrated Bible as a present and started reading aloud: ‘The last shall be the first’. But Mr Cool, doubtless suffering from mental aberrations owing to under-nourishment, failed to recognise his favourite text, snatched the fat volume out of my hands and, enraged, brought it crashing down on my head. Then he began to yell that Monsieur Delet was just as ‘incorrigible’ as he and ought to be in the camp as well. We hastily departed.

From Mr Cool we went to see Alexey Spiridonovich. Already on the stairs we heard wails and moans. That was our friend reading the paper.

'They've cut down the Cherry Orchard,' he cried without even saying how-do-you-do. 'Russia's dead! What would Tolstoy have said had he lived to see this day?' Then he hurled himself on Monsieur Delet's breast. I am not a great collector of photographs but I would give much to see that scene recorded on a snapshot today. Alexey Spiridonovich explained to Monsieur Delet that Russia had nothing to do with what was going on; it was all the fault of two or three foreigners in German pay. But soon the liberation would come and he, Alexey Spiridonovich, gave Monsieur Delet his word of honour that all debts, all down to the last centime, would be paid. Now, however, he was unable to help in any way for he was suffering from nervous debility, engaged in sabotage and waiting for the happy day of the inauguration of the Constituent Assembly.

Our next visits brought us little comfort. We were never even allowed to see Schmidt, who was occupying some important post or other. After standing in queues for many days and obtaining seven different passes, we were finally turned away by some individual who disliked both the stamps on our passes and the look of our faces. To make up for this disappointment we ran into Ercole in the street. Seeing us he at once assumed a heroic pose, pointing with one hand and pressing the other to his heart. 'You don't know it yet, but I'm a monument now, yes really, a monument. It's a job like any other, no worse than telling beads.'

Ercole told us there had been a move to draw him into some sort of manual work, shovelling snow or some such thing, ignoring the fact that he, Bambucci the Roman, had never done any work in his life and would not do any in the future. He had met another Italian—a fellow in the coral trade—and they had consulted together on what was to be done. Ercole had thought of reviving his Vatican past and declaring himself, a Dominican once more. 'The Madonna protect you!' the coral

merchant had cried. 'That isn't at all in fashion now, quite the contrary.'

'Very well, then, I'll say that I've killed a thousand Austrians, that I'm practically a general, a sub-general.'

'That's even worse, they might shoot you for that.'

'But what *do* they like, then, the devils?'

'Art. It's the same thing as monks used to be in the old days.'

Ercole, delighted, remembered his native Rome, the statues of goddesses, the devils over the church portals and the English-woman who had painted his portrait. At first he decided to proclaim himself an artist. 'But they might make you paint pictures eight hours a day!' Hesitation. Expectoration. Solution. He would not be an artist but a picture, or rather, not a picture but a sculpture.

Next day, overcoming all obstacles, he burst into the meeting of some archaeological commission and began impersonating the gods, generals, tritons and poets of monumental Rome. That day he went home with the longed-for certificate announcing that 'Comrade Ercole Bambucci was a person protected by the "Department for the Preservation of Art and Ancient Monuments of the R.S.F.S.R.".'

After telling us all this and adding that his rations were pretty thin but he could nevertheless let Monsieur Delet have a pound of grain and a quarter of a pound of so-called 'confectioner's wares', Ercole did the Fountain of Neptune for us, spat with special significance and went away.

All these meetings and conversations had a dreadful effect on Monsieur Delet. During the week I spent in his company I had every opportunity to convince myself of the gravity of his condition. There remained one feeble hope: Ercole had told us how to find Aysha, who, he added, was doing very well. Monsieur Delet cheered up a little and said he supposed Aysha was working as a manservant to some 'important bandit', or Bolshevik, and might be able to get back Monsieur Delet's bank, safe and savings book and help him to get out of this barbarous country.

We went to the address given to us, namely the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. The spacious reception rooms were deserted, for in those days Russia entertained no relations with any foreign State. There was only an old lady—evidently a governess—having a stormy scene with the Commissar himself over the unlawful requisitioning of several nightshirts and other garments which she, a Swiss citizen, not being a Bolshevik but an honest Calvinist, could not mention by name. Monsieur Delet, never the man to waste an opportunity, also became very agitated, talking about the safe, Kuzma and Pink pills all at once. But the Commissar did not take kindly to this. He gave a diplomatic smile and left the room.

We went through to the offices at the back of the building. These were full of people and humming with activity. We asked for Aysha and were taken to the 'African Peoples' Section'.

Although I had lost the divine faculty of surprise during the years of war and revolution, Aysha's story made me sit up. Taking it all in all, Ercole made a pretty good monument and prison bars went well enough with Mr Cool and his perpetual thirst for a spiritual life. But Aysha, dear little Aysha with whom I had played so innocently on the banks of happy Senegal, Aysha as Director of Propaganda for the Negro Peoples—this was extraordinary and amazing, this had the simplicity of genius. 'Whites kill us, Whites bad. No more good corporals for us.' In short, Aysha felt wonderful in his new role. But I dared not glance at Monsieur Delet: his eyes were wild, there was a rattle in his throat and he was trying crazily to snatch the rubber stamp lying on the table and put it on Aysha's hair. Aysha, smiling gently, gave proof of his good memory and noble nature by addressing Monsieur Delet thus: 'Remember you tell Aysha, Aysha French, Aysha mine, Aysha go, fight in war? Now Aysha say you mine, you Senegalese, Aysha love you very much. Come and work here. You junior clerk Aysha's office'.

What happened next was perfect madness. Monsieur Delet jumped up on the table and began to crow in a high cracked

voice, like a cockerel: 'Special class for me! Toads! Carrion from Class Sixteen! You're trying to pinch my legs! I'll show you! How they stink! Mob! Corpses! I want three hundred scented handkerchiefs! I put my seal on your Senegal and bury it under Class Three! Give me back my safe! *Vive l'alliance franco-russe*! Officer, tie up Kuzma! To Monsieur Deibler with him! Chop off his head! Then into the pit, and no undertaker for him!'

Alas, there could be no more doubt: poor Monsieur Delet had taken leave of his senses. They tied him up and took him off to the asylum in Kanatchikova Dacha. Next day I resumed my interrupted duties and, lamenting everything, shed a sincere tear for dear Monsieur Delet, who for the sake of the chimera of a Universal Necropolis had exchanged his green peas and his Lucie for the dreary wards of a lunatic asylum. His sense of order and harmony, the hierarchical structure of his world—graceful like a Gothic cathedral—his feather-weight enjoyment of life, his carefree, smiling wisdom proved unable to withstand that ghastly chaos or, as the Teacher had foretold, that 'cosy preparatory form'.

## CHAPTER XXV | Jurenito issues degrees—argument about freedom in the central Cheka

IN THE EARLY SPRING, when even the Government, convinced at last of the unreal nature of Petersburg, had moved to Moscow, the Teacher suddenly arrived. He came to see me, inquired into my way of life, expressed disapproval and proposed that I should immediately stop lamenting and go with him to Kineshma as his private secretary. When I asked him what he had been doing for the past six months he replied briefly: 'Pretty tough, their habits, the devil take them! I've been pulling them up by the roots. My hands are all blisters'.

He was going to Kineshma as Commissar.

Three days later we were sitting on the sagging bed of a Kineshma hotel room, and the Teacher, gazing through the window at the local sparks who furtively pawed the sleepy ox-eyed peasant women going past whilst simultaneously admiring two copulating dogs, developed his programme: 'The worst will be if, instead of demolishing and building anew, they start patching up. What could be more trite, after moving the gallery down to the stalls, than to go on performing the same problem play? I am going to try and translate into reality the new foundations of equality, organisation and rational existence'.

A little later typewriters began to clatter defiantly in the next room: that was Jurenito issuing decrees. He began with equality. All commissars, Soviet experts and artistes of the local Karl Marx cabaret were ordered to move into slum dwellings and basements. Further,\* commissars in charge of clothing depots or 'Commissions for the Requisitioning of Surplus Goods from the Bourgeoisie' were ordered to wear a standard uniform: Russian shirt, sheepskin coat (of simple cut), peaked cap and army boots. Finally, the diet of both higher and lower officials

of the Foodstuffs Department was to be confined to millet gruel, popularly known as *psha*. However, these measures, though sensible enough in themselves, led to appalling disorder. The activities of various highly important institutions (including the Commission for the Requisitioning of Surplus Goods and the Karl Marx cabaret) ceased almost entirely. Many complaints were dispatched to the Centre in Moscow.

Jurenito, undaunted, proceeded to prepare for total organisation and the exorcising of the phantom—the corrupting phantom, as he said—of personal freedom. On one and the same day, April 12th, he issued three short decrees affecting different spheres of life. Here is the exact text:

- ‘1. In view of the shortage of leather raw materials and manufactured footwear, and also of the poor condition of the pavements in the town of Kineshma, all citizens are hereby forbidden to walk in the streets during working hours from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. except on official business or with appropriate authorisation.
2. Until such time as the Central Soviet organs shall have worked out a unified plan of births for 1919, citizens of the town of Kineshma and district are hereby forbidden to procreate as from the 15th instant.
3. Existing conditions demand that all honest citizens should make a maximum effort towards the reconstruction of industry and transport. Therefore, to avoid putting the brains of Soviet workers under unnecessary strain, the issue of philosophical and theological books by the public library is temporarily suspended.’

These decrees caused a veritable storm. The Kineshma Communist organisation decided—I cannot imagine why—that Jurenito was not a Marxist, and appealed to the Party Central Committee.

‘Oh hypocrites!’ cried the Teacher in indignation. ‘They have been called upon to destroy, yet, among the ruins, crowbar in hand, they are playing at being archaeologists or, at the very least, antiquarians. What’s the difference between their



splendid scale of food rations—from the quarter-pound loaf of bread to the caviare sandwich—and our unhappy friend's sixteen categories? They love freedom just as much as Gladstone, Gambetta or the members of the *Society for the Protection of Petty Trade in the Southern Departments of France*. No less than the gentlemen of Old England are they concerned that the home should remain sacred. Is it more difficult to order or prohibit procreation than to command men to kill or pray, forbid them to harbour forbidden thoughts or to sleep with goods not bonded and bought? O bigots, hangers of draperies over the crater of Vesuvius, members of high society dressed up as *apaches*, tailors stitching the last pitiful patch—a scrap of stuff taken from the least suitable part of the garment—on Adam's threadbare trousers!'

But Jurenito's enemies thought differently and took energetic steps to have him replaced. In a report sent to the Petersburg *Krasnaya Gazeta* the Teacher was described as an 'ignorant autocrat', a 'hanger-on' whose actions brought dishonour upon the sacred cause of the proletariat.

The decisive battle was fought shortly afterwards in connection with Jurenito's attitude to aesthetic problems. The Teacher believed that the arts—in the sense of the word used hitherto, i.e. the proliferation of absolutely useless things—were not needed by the new society and should be destroyed without delay. In a later chapter I shall explain in detail the considerations which guided Jurenito in his neo-iconoclasm, but in the meantime I give only his conclusions; namely, his firm intention to mete out the same treatment to the nine Muses as to the 'incorrigible' Mr Cool. The Kineshma Bolsheviks held a diametrically opposed view and worshipped the arts to the point of silliness. Eighteen theatres had been opened in the town. Everyone acted in them; members of the Central Committee and the Cheka, chiefs of statistical departments, first-formers from the unified school, militiamen, 'counter-revolutionaries' under arrest, even actors. Nightly, at the Liebknecht Theatre, the Young Communist League put on a play entitled *The*

*Mother-in-Law, or Everything Upside Down*, in which the mother-in-law was not at all the world revolution but a perfectly ordinary mother-in-law from the good old days.

All this, of course, differed only in degree from the former Kineshma theatre run by the merchant Kutehin.

A good deal, too, had been achieved in the sphere of painting. Owing to the peasants' irresponsible attitude towards art, various masterpieces had been taken from nearby country houses, and Kineshma solemnly opened its own picture gallery. Pride of place was given to three pictures: the first showed a dead fish with its mouth agape, an empty bottle and a head of cabbage ('Dutch School'); in the second ('attributed to Andrea del Sarto') a very large-breasted, heavy woman was smiling coquettishly at a postman dressed as an angel, making sheep's eyes; whilst the third was dotted all over with blotches, some purple, some plain dirty, which, in the painter Vrubel's opinion, were meant to convey superhuman passion.

The Teacher unhesitatingly ordered the gallery and all theatres to close down at once, the accommodation to be made available for technical and vocational schools, the painters to be set to work on designing comfortable men's footwear and armchairs for Soviet offices, and the actresses to be furnished with the necessary directives and sent into rural districts to persuade the peasants to grow more potatoes.

RABIS, or the Union of Workers in the Arts, sent a despairing wire to Moscow, and presently an answer was received: 'Remove the vandal'. The chairman of the local Communist organisation was triumphant: 'Didn't I say he wasn't a Marxist but a bourgeois, that is, a vandal?'. Jurenito and I went back to Moscow.

Directly on arrival we went to a big Communist meeting in the lecture hall of the Polytechnic Museum. The very first speeches convinced us that the Kineshma actors' point of view was shared by the country's great, audacious leaders. Here is what they said: 'The beauty of the antique world is being born again in the proletarian State'—'we are the champions of free

thought'—'the reign of freedom has arrived'. Unable to bear this ancient cud-chewing, these faded forget-me-nots, these hundreds of thousands of musty mattresses, the Teacher cried: 'Aren't you ashamed of wasting your time on stale beauty and rotten freedom? You are the real counter-revolutionaries!'

There was some consternation, and when we had left the museum and walked a hundred paces or so, two well-dressed young men approached us very civilly with a suggestion that we might like to continue our journey by car, and delivered us with all speed and comfort to the Cheka headquarters.

The Teacher's interrogation was brief: 'Do you deny the existence of beauty and freedom in the Communist State?'

'Certainly.'

'Do you regard the speakers at the meeting as counter-revolutionaries?'

'Of course.'

As for me, I merely hummed and hawed and complained of pains in the stomach, but in the end I signed my name to the Teacher's statement.

In the evening they came to tell us that we had been sentenced to the supreme penalty.

'What does that mean?' I asked the Teacher.

'Since to sentence us to immortality lies beyond their power, I fancy this is a perfectly banal death sentence,' Jurenito replied.

Once again I lived through the sombre boredom of the hours preceding death. I was not at all eager to die, firstly because I have a frank and unashamed love of life—any sort of life, even in a Cheka cell—and secondly because I was curious to know how this whole marvellous commotion was going to end.

In those days I could not yet grasp and comprehend the events around me; blindly obeying the Teacher's words, I could not understand his intentions, and often, in my heart of hearts, I rebelled. Sometimes I was seized by a tremendous longing for ordinary everyday life, without any universal scale, without the prospect of millennia, without the obligation to shoulder the heavy burden of reflection, doubt and all the rest of it, a

life which included cream cakes and the poems of Balmont. At those times I would run to Alexey Spiridonovich, who had a large map of Russia and always knew the exact position of the Czechs, the Don Cossacks, the Germans and the French: in fact, he knew whether the 'glorious resurrection' was at hand.

Sometimes, when I happened to be in the company of lawyers or businessmen who, like myself, missed their *Russkoye Slovo* with its soulful *feuilletons* by the unfrocked priest Grigory Petrov over their morning coffee, the stock exchange, the club, the 'freedom of speech, conscience, movement and the press', I would suddenly become quite cheerful and gloat over their grief. At such moments I derived a deep moral satisfaction from the triumph of justice—like something in a good English novel—as well as finding true delight in the glorious rumpus, a delight familiar to all admirers of that outstanding actor Charlie Chaplin, who knows so well how to wreak havoc in a china shop and knock respectable ladies off their feet.

But there were other moments when neither the Czechoslovaks with their sweet buns nor the broken sugar bowls could satisfy me any longer. I tried to comprehend the Teacher's words about the 'new iron art of living'. I tried to see myself through Ilovaysky's distorting eyes. Then I would see weird and wonderful things—the sky above was dimmed by cyclopic spirals and cubes. Future generations marched with resounding step, rational yet sheeplike, across the cold, bright squares. Nature cringed fawning at their feet, producing what looked like a white flag from underneath her regulation 'veil of mystery'. And, at the end of it all, I glimpsed something like a final railway crash, involving comets and other heavenly bodies (or perhaps not), with splintered glass, rusty iron, and liberation.

As I waited for death in the Cheka cell I thought convulsively of everything at once, conscious of the absurdity, the utter silliness of having to die without even witnessing the end of Act I. The night passed miserably. In the morning we were summoned and led up and down slippery stairs smelling of cats

and cabbage, along narrow passages and across well-like interior courtyards. The Teacher had his arm thrust through mine, and this alone gave me strength. He smiled and joked with the soldiers, protesting that he hadn't been issued a full day's rations in the morning, which he would have had ample time to eat. There was a buzzing in my ears, and unexpected scraps of blue which someone had forgotten to sweep from the sky flickered senselessly before my eyes. Then—I couldn't understand why—they led us off again through corridors and up and down stairs, and instead of finishing us off, simply and honourably, with a few rifle bullets, they took us into a room with dirty wallpaper where an intellectual-looking man was drinking tea and munching lumps of sugar.

He glanced at us with short-sighted, very good-natured eyes and said that on the occasion of the arrival in Moscow of a deputation of—he thought—Siamese Communists, a general amnesty had been proclaimed and we in particular would not be shot. The Teacher heard this in silence; I uttered a polite *merci* as I had been taught to do as a child. The intellectual-looking man, however, obviously thinking me unworthy of notice, turned to Jurenito with a question:

'Tell me—I'd genuinely like to know—are you really so blind and malicious in your hatred of the Government of Workers and Peasants that you can't see something that's obvious to all? Do you refuse to recognise the simple fact that the R.S.F.S.R. is the true home of freedom?'

The Teacher smiled.

'Alas, comrade, I'm neither malicious nor blind. I say "alas", for malice and the refusal to see are tokens of struggle and movement, and therefore of life. Regrettably, I have good eyes, a sober mind and a well-balanced temperament. But that's by the way. Still less can I hate a Government, for life has taught me to respect all trades practised by man. As to the revolution, it's very near to my heart, and I may say that for 31 years of my life I have occupied myself, by preference, with destruction, subversion, infiltration and other purifying operations. Free-

dom, however, is an abstraction and in our day a most harmful one. You are destroying freedom: that is why I salute you. You are the greatest liberators of mankind, for the yoke you bring is a most excellent one, not of gilt but of iron, sturdy and well-made. A day will come when "freedom" will be the revolutionary slogan of boys in their last year at school, and from it, like feathers from a plucked chicken, will come flying the magnificence and all the thousand vestments of the world you're building today. But for the present "freedom" is a counter-revolutionary concept, the *rentier's* pillow, the sticky sweet clutched in the anthropophagus's fist, the consecration of all the world's refuse-heaps. I salute you, for in the space of a year you have completely knocked the very notion of freedom out of the heads of idlers, dreamers and good-for-nothing prattlers. But it pains me very much to see that you are not the captains of your ship, and that the crazy change of course is due, not to a turn of the helm, but to the force of the black waves. In short, you don't know yourselves what you're doing. Of course it often happens, but it's a sad thing for all that. If you don't shoot me I'll collaborate with you to the full: that is, I shall destroy beauty and freedom of thought, feeling and action wherever I can in the name of a unified, lawful and correct organisation of mankind.'

The intellectual, who turned out to be a Revolutionary investigator, grew indignant. He put aside his cup and actually jumped off the sofa, crossed the room at a run and, wishing to convince the Teacher, opened the *Communist A.B.C.* and started reading out about the rate of surplus value. After three pages or so he exclaimed: 'Now, I hope you've understood: from the reign of necessity we've entered the reign of freedom!'

'Dear comrade, I don't doubt that the reign of freedom will be established one day (possibly when the last men are wiped off the face of our planet). Meanwhile it is precisely the reign of pure necessity that we are entering, where brute force is not concealed under the trite and sentimental trappings of a British Lord. I beg of you, do not trim your cudgel with

violets! Your mission is a great and complicated one: to accustom men to their fetters until they come to regard them as a mother's tender caress. To achieve this you've no need to creep up stealthily, hiding the fetters behind your back. No, you must create a new mystique for the new slavery. It is not enough to tempt the first-former with university diplomas, you must teach him to look forward to the years—hundreds, perhaps thousands of years—stretching before him. For all your education and fondness for quotations, you strike me as a man of commonsense and action. Why don't you leave freedom to the syphilitics in the cafés of Montmartre and go on without it to do all the things you're doing anyway?

'You're incorrigible,' the investigator replied coldly. 'Owing to your curious terminology I wasn't able to make sure exactly what you were, a monarchist or an anarchist. In any case you're a counter-revolutionary and your sympathy for Soviet power bears a clearly provocational character. We are not freedom's enemies but its most jealous defenders. Your death sentence, and that of citizen Ehrenburg, are commuted to forced labour and confinement in a concentration camp until the end of the Civil War. I hope that there you'll come to realise your error!'

## CHAPTER XXVI    Mr Cool and the communist family—the food commissar's tears—the Holy Grail

WE WERE PUT IN THE SAME CAMP as Mr Cool, so that our confinement was not without pleasure. The indefatigable missionary had had time during his imprisonment to adjust himself a little to the great changes which had taken place, and even to become reconciled to them. He had not, of course, become a communist—he did not even claim to be a sympathiser—but nevertheless, he had softened and regained his old respect for his two books, the blue and the morocco-bound.

‘I was wrong to think that all was lost. The dollar and morality continue to rule mankind. The more they persecute the dollar, the faster it grows, and insulted morality dominates its detractors.’

The Teacher conducted long conversations on abstract subjects with Mr Cool, e.g. ‘The evangelists’ concept of ownership’, ‘St Paul and Lenin’, etc. And I killed time by playing the card game Sixty-six with the American for a quarter of a pound of tobacco for every sixty-six games won. Although we had been sentenced to forced labour we did nothing and could do nothing apart from the things I have just mentioned. The camp commandant said in reply to our complaints that soon a special commission would be set up to devise a more productive occupation for us. The Teacher’s attitude to all commissions was always one of unconcealed scepticism and, since he suffered greatly from our enforced idleness, he began to look for another way out, and presently found one.    u

It appeared that we could be released on the guarantee of two members of the Communist Party. Aysha was, of course, the first. The second one presented more difficulty. We had heard rumours that Schmidt was completely changed, had sent



his Reich to the devil and had become an active Spartakist, but those were only rumours. The new *élite* had no outward distinguishing features whatsoever; all the tips we had been given turned out to be wrong; portraits of Marx and red stars in the lapel were used by non-party men as well, to ensure more comfortable travel on the trams.

We had almost given up hope of finding a second communist when a lucky chance saved us. One of the inmates of our camp was a certain Bryuhalov, formerly the owner of a tavern and garden on the Shabolovka. He never wasted his time but pored continually over a pile of books. Often at night I would hear him repeating dully but with dogged perseverance: 'Stockholm Congress, London Congress, Mother of God, save and protect us!' One day this Bryuhalov took my tobacco ration of fifteen cigarettes, which I had only just received, and put it in his pocket. I was so indignant that I nearly choked with coughing. But Bryuhalov, by way of explanation, told me amicably that he wasn't really being held in the camp but was staying there of his own free will until the Housing Department found him somewhere to live, and that only yesterday he had passed his examination in Party Education and had been accepted as a candidate in a cell. I stopped coughing at once and began clearing my throat politely instead. Bryuhalov turned out to be a kindly person and free from arrogance. After a brief but serious conversation in private with Mr Cool he gave his signature.

We were released and all three of us obtained jobs at once: the Teacher in the South American Section of Aysha's Department, Mr Cool in the Interdepartmental Commission for the Suppression of Prostitution, and I in Durov's Children's Theatre, where I helped dear Vladimir Leonidovich to train rabbits and guinea-pigs to fire off toy guns, hoist flags and perform similar deeds of heroism.

We all settled down together in two rooms requisitioned from a certain speculator named Grossmann. Next to us in the same flat lived the Nazimovs, a communist couple. Mr Cool

was perfectly happy. Together with Grossmann he devised something like a sequel to Gogol's *Dead Souls* on an American scale. They bought up nationalised factories, cancelled shares and requisitioned securities. Every day Grossmann would hunt round obscure coffee-shops and follow up dubious addresses—usually to be approached by the backstairs—to return with sheaves of dog-eared bonds. Enraptured, he would expound his creed to Mr Cool:

'The stock exchange is greater than anything. Drive us out—we'll go to the catacombs; in darkness, suffocating, we'll live by the murmur of figures, the rustling of notes. For this I am prepared to die, and before I die I'll cry: "The 3 per cent's going up! The Maltsevskys are no good! The pound's stable!" The Stock Exchange is the pulse of the world. I come into a wretched hole of a place, the home of Chibishev, the stock-broker from whom *they've* taken everything. Wife, children, stove, soup, washing! Poverty, smoke, non-life! And then it happens, the fabulous, the mysterious thing. Chibishev whispers in my ear: "The dollar's going up. It was quoted at two higher in Paris!" And I see the triumph of the New World over Europe, the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour. "The lira's falling!" Poor Italy! *They're* setting to work there. Blood is flowing through the veins of the world, and I, Grossmann, cut off from the holy stock exchanges of London, Paris and Berlin, can sense its heat, its pulsating course here, in Bolshevik Moscow.' Mr Cool, transfigured with emotion, would press Grossmann's hand.

But, strange as it may seem, he made friends with the Nazis too. They were very nice, honest people, old party workers. Mr Cool liked them for their high morality. Once when a female admirer of my poetic gifts came to see me and didn't take herself off in time, Comrade Nazimova expressed her feelings on the matter to Mr Cool in the following terms:

'Ehrenburg's a first-rate example of degenerate bourgeois culture. Of course I'm against church marriage, but haven't we introduced civil union? The main point is, I wouldn't object so

much to his not having reported his intentions towards this comrade at the sub-department of Civil Registration, if only I could feel that they were bound by real closeness of ideas. But they aren't, are they? Comrade Andrey, my husband, and I are linked by thirteen years of party work. That's the only way to explain it. Suppose he was a Menshevik, do you think I could ever——?'

The walls in the Nazimovs' room were decorated with picture postcards—Karl Marx, Repin's *What Breadth!* and the Venus de Milo—for beauty and the arts were sacred to the couple. When Nazimov went off on a *subbotnik*, or 'working Saturday', usually to carry logs to Ryazansky Station, he would quote his favourite lines of Balmont all the way: '*I long for burning buildings, I long for the howl of the storm*'. Nazimova was very fond of attending the Arts Theatre, and when on the stage the wind whistled, crickets chirruped, sleigh-bells tinkled or the bellies of 'superfluous men' made a rumbling noise, she would go into an ecstasy of admiration: 'That's true theatre! An illusion! A dream!'

The Nazimovs led a very modest regular life: the office in the morning, conferences during the day, meetings in the evenings. Sometimes, past midnight, after a stirring conversation with Grossmann, Mr Cool liked to go to the Nazimovs' room. The lamp would be burning cosily and Comrade Olga would be reading the latest *Theses on Trade Unions* to Comrade Andrey, who would interject from time to time: 'This is syndicalism! Where's Marx in all that? Dangerous Martovist demagoguery!', etc. Mr Cool would sit down and listen too, or rather not so much listen as enjoy the perfect calm and peace which reigned within this family. 'You aren't revolutionaries,' he would say, 'you're the worthiest of Quakers. I'm not a bit afraid of you,' and he would courageously touch the arm of Comrade Andrey, who would take no notice, shocked by the petty-bourgeois tendencies of the workers' opposition.

Mr Cool drew Comrade Nazimova into the work of the anti-prostitution Commission. Like many other home industries, the

trade was booming in Moscow, having lost its former narrow caste-bound character. Everyone, of course, understood its deep social roots, but, not satisfied with diagnosis, they wanted palliatives as well. Mr Cool suggested that prostitutes who switched over to productive work should receive bonuses in kind; Comrade Nazimova—who, like most of the communists I've met, was a confirmed idealist—believed in moral persuasion and, particularly, in lectures on the lives of the world's great women communists.

Comrade Radyelov, a Commissar in the Food Commissariat, also played an important role on the Commission. He sometimes came to see Mr Cool, and that is how we met him. A man devoted heart and soul to his work, he spoke exclusively of wagon-loads, freights, hundredweights of bread, dried fish, etc. He went about in a remodelled lady's coat, a hopelessly torn garment which he had acquired heaven knows how, lived on a pound of bread and a vile liquid known as 'vegetable soup for Category B canteens', was thin and in poor health, but thought of nothing except his mysterious wagons crawling along some pre-ordained line.

However, Radyelov had one weakness: sometimes, he would be seized by a wild and raging desire for a woman, not any particular woman—for, preoccupied with wagon-loads, he did not notice people—just woman in general. But he was ugly. His ugliness had a peculiar, museum-piece quality: a purple face deeply pitted with pockmarks, a cataract in his left eye and a huge Adam's apple quivering under a paper collar. No woman had ever felt anything for him except revulsion mixed with pity. Radyelov could never bring himself to go to a prostitute—this would have gone against the very basis of his principles—but in periods of extreme need he resorted to a rather naïve form of self-deception. He would find some housemaid or seamstress, bring her a few presents, talk about his ideas for half an hour or so, and then, finally losing consciousness, he would stop talking and begin to act.

Radyelov was just experiencing such a crisis of long-unsatisfied

desire when I met him. Sometimes it seemed that his mystic trains would all crash at any moment and all his figures would be swallowed up in the dark vortex of lust.

One night Radyelov invited me and Jurenito to go with him to a certain charming telegraphist whom he was instructing and whose sponsor he would soon be on the solemn occasion of her reception into a 'cell'. We agreed, and Radyelov took with him two pounds of sugar and a pound of flax oil, his whole month's rations. As I've already said, he always ate his bread dry and drank his carrot-tea without sugar.

The telegraphist, Comrade Marusya, turned out to be a very meek, but most particularly a very thin creature. I've seen some thin people in Moscow, in fact I've never seen anything but thin people there, but Marusya's thinness was amazing: a skeleton skimpily covered with flabby skin. Seeing the sugar and oil she fixed them with a religious stare and could not shift it. Radyelov began to speak with unusual heat about wagon-loads and how much of what was going to be delivered in Moscow. 'More herrings and kerosene on Card A. What majesty there is in such equalisation of consumption! 13,102 wagon-loads! A unified economic plan. For the first time the working elements, freed from the parasites, have all they need!' Marusya went on staring—motionless, as though mesmerised—at the little bottle of cloudy yellowish liquid.

Suddenly Radyelov gave a great twitch. Leaving unfinished his paean in praise of the new card system, he moved closer to Marusya and muttered, almost choking: 'You, Comrade! . . . conscious and beautiful! . . .' We turned away and began closely examining a reproduction of Böcklin's *Island of the Dead* which hung on the wall.

But suddenly Radyelov jumped to his feet, crying: 'You've got bones sticking out everywhere, bones, do you hear me? What is this? How can this be?'

Marusya, doing up her blouse in confusion, whispered: 'Well, the fact is, Comrade, the ration's been cut again; last month there wasn't any issue at all, no fats, I'm sorry, Comrade!'

Radyelov wept aloud. No, he did not weep, he howled. A few words were recognisable amid the screams: 'The rations! . . . I can't! . . . fats! . . . What is this? . . . poor, poor thing!' He became uglier than ever, his face red and swollen, crouching on the floor, crying more and more bitterly.

We went out. The stairs were slippery with frost, and dark. The insane howling, unlike anything else on earth, still came from the flat. The Teacher said: 'People laugh at anyone who can't calculate the next step, anyone who misses a stair and falls. Poor people! How serious, how solemn they are before all their carnival nonsense, how careless and stupid when faced with impossibility and doom. From the 13,102 wagon-loads to Marusya's sticking-out ribs there's one step or infinity. Radyelov's tears are a great, an unforgettable thing. If I believed in ritual I'd collect them in a cup: a new Holy Grail. And when humanity was about to fall asleep, grunting with pleasure, having composed some suitable rhyme and invented some perfectly feasible reform, I'd sprinkle these tears of despair and shame over the creators of "harmony", the champions of progress, over the rich earth fertilised by the nothingness of the dead and the greed of the living'.

## CHAPTER XXVII      The Great Inquisitor outside the legend

IN THOSE DAYS of shortage and boredom, hungry and cold, a knitted scarf wound round my head, I began not to think but to reflect, i.e. to try and encompass the world and myself from all sides at once. Nothing came of it; the full-face cancelled out the profile, but the whole remained elusive. Neither the Holy Grail of the Food Commissariat nor the Nazimovs' idyll could explain the meaning of events. My labours at Durov's theatre were equally fruitless.

I reflected day and night, simply and in verse, and actually called my poems *Moscow Reflections*. I was terrified of being like Hans Andersen's child who remarked that the Emperor had no clothes: the pious gaze of millions would in itself have been enough to weave a resplendent garment even if, in the natural course of events, there had been none. But the other extreme did not satisfy me either. That's the way I'm made. Suppose there's a big hefty fellow singing about the Host of Heaven. Well, I just can't help thinking he's got a nose with blackheads and beads of sweat on it; what's going on inside his head? 'Soon I'll have finished singing, then I can eat vegetable soup and slap Vaska the tomcat on the nose.' Which is better—to put St Paul in clink like any burglar, or to stand open-mouthed before anyone and everyone, watch while he bashes in the faces of gods and men, and wait in case he's suddenly delivered of a new gospel?

Thus I reflected, confronted with the current-events page of *Izvestia*, certain myths, Lenin's speeches and half a pound of dried fish issued against coupon No. 87 by one of Radyelov's assistants. All these doubts I duly communicated to Jurenito. The Teacher said: 'I've been thinking myself that I'd like to clear my mind of various species of dried fish. For that purpose we're going to visit the captain's bridge and have a chat with a

certain personage who occupies it. There, like a medical student in his first year walking the wards, you'll have a chance to study at first hand the various symptoms of this new ideological fever. Meet me tomorrow at 2 a.m.'.

Knowing the Teacher I avoided the pitfall of curiosity and refrained from asking whom precisely we were going to see, why at so late an hour and, finally, how he hoped to obtain a pass.

As we walked through the deserted, blizzard-swept Kremlin towards the 'captain', I realised I was afraid. It isn't that I believed the delightful legends told at leisure by the wives of former assistant attorneys, who represented the Bolshevik leaders as something between Jack the Ripper and the locusts of the Apocalypse. No, I was simply afraid of men who could do things, not only to themselves but also to others. I have always had that fear, even as a little boy when I invariably gave a wide berth to the kindly policeman who used to doze on the corner of Prechistenka. In later years, seeing many of my friends, boon companions and classmates in the role of Ministers, Commissars and other 'men in power', I understood that my fear was aroused not by persons but by something extraneous, or more precisely by the portfolio, the insignia of office, even the merest little mandate. Who knows what such a man may want? But what he wants he will undoubtedly get. In short, I declared to the Teacher that I refused to go and see this leading communist because I was extremely frightened of him. It would be much better if I walked up and down outside the gate and waited. He could tell me all about it afterwards. This took place when we were already inside the front door, and the Teacher, instead of replying, merely gave me a shove towards the stairs in a fatherly fashion. But my terror increased when the last sentry of all, after studying my face for a long time, finally said with unusual solemnity: 'You may go in'.

Entering the private office I just caught a glimpse of a pair of eyes, mocking and intelligent, and understood that I must run. But, instead, I darted behind a pillar supporting a bust of



Engels which stood in the corner and, hidden by it, crouched down, shivering with cold and fear: 'Now, now he'll discover me. What a disgrace! How will the future biographer of Ilya Ehrenburg, the poet, describe this moment? I have not been afraid of either guns or mortars, of Schmidt or Aysha's fellow-tribesmen, yet here I am, suddenly terrified of this good-natured chap who was my neighbour in Paris five years ago and used to drink *bocks* in my favourite café'. Still I could not overcome my fear. I stayed in that corner all the time they were talking. At one point some dust got up my nose and I sneezed, making the great man look up in surprise and the Teacher say disparagingly: 'That's just a comrade I've brought along; pay no attention.'

Many and varied interviews with the leaders of Communism have appeared in the European press. Two were particularly vivid: the English author H. G. Wells's conversation with Lenin about walks through towns of the future, accompanied by the merry clicking of a photographer's camera giving its utmost, and an account by the special correspondent of *Buenas Días*, the Madrid paper, of how Trotsky, throughout the interview, avidly devoured small cutlets prepared from the flesh of bourgeois babies. Nevertheless I believe that the Teacher's midnight talk with the communist is of exceptional interest by reason of the acute and fundamental nature of the subjects discussed. Despite my dismal situation I really felt that the small room with its high windows opening on to a snowy waste was becoming transformed into a captain's bridge, and the dead Kremlin and the whole of icy, sombre Russia into a wild ship casting off into the night.

At first, by the way, the communist attempted to speak about quite different things, preferring not to reply but to question: was the social revolution in Mexico near at hand? Was electrification widespread there? etc. But the Teacher quickly switched the conversation to another track. To do this he adopted a well-tried method of attack, forcing the communist to defend himself and so show his mettle.

‘What do you think,’ Jurenito began, ‘of the inaction, indiscipline and reckless waste of forces in the Soviet Republic? Our immediate programme includes the sowing campaign, the Donbass (Donets coalfield), the Prodagit (agricultural propaganda), and, finally, electrification. Yet what are our forces being spent on? The poets are writing verses about Caucasian Murids and tortoises in the Epirus, the artists are painting beards and wash-bowls, the philosophers tinkering with new philosophical systems, the philologists picking about among their roots; the mathematicians likewise. The theatres are putting on Claudel’s mystery plays. Why haven’t all theatres been closed down? Why haven’t poetry, philosophy and other forms of idle nonsense been abolished?’

‘You’d do much better,’ the communist replied peaceably, ‘to discuss all that with Anatoly Vasilyevich. Art’s his weakness. I myself don’t know the first thing about it and have no interest whatsoever in the pursuits you’ve mentioned. I think it’s much more fun to issue decrees on the nationalisation of small live-stock—which will awaken millions of people—than to read the poems of Pushkin which, quite frankly, send me to sleep. Since childhood, I haven’t read anything except works in my own special field. I never look at pictures because I find looking at charts more interesting. I’ve never been to the theatre except last year when I had to go once, in the line of duty, to entertain some “guests of the Republic”, and it was even more soporific than the Pushkin of my schooldays. In order to achieve communism it is necessary to concentrate all forces, all thoughts, one’s whole will, one’s whole life on one thing: economics. A sown acre of land, a built railway engine, a batch of manufactured products—these are the way to communism, and therefore the goal of our lives, their meaning and justification. Forget your Sanskrit vocables, your lovers’ sighs, your attempts to make new gods or repair the old ones, your pictures, poems, tragedies and so forth. You’d do better to make one scythe or produce a single pound of bread.’

‘I understand you,’ said Jurenito. ‘You are an outstanding

example of healthy single-mindedness. Those who have many thoughts end their lives crouching behind pillars.' (This was after my sneeze). 'Those who start life wear merciless blinkers which focus all their energies on a single idea. Single-mindedness is action, movement, life. Reflection is a splendid and brilliant entertainment, the dessert served at the last dinner before death.

'Now allow me to ask you another question. How can you tolerate those left-wing Socialist Revolutionaries still making speeches at meetings, those idealists who continue—for all that they may do it quietly, within the circle of their families—to run down historical materialism, those millions of people who still believe, not in the triumph of communism but in the healing faculties of Saint Pantheleimon?'

'That isn't up my street either. If you want an explanation, go to Comrade . . .' (an acute attack of fear made me miss the name). 'It seems to me that harmless people, even if they err, should not be persecuted. Of course we're right. Of course they're wrong. Some of them are fools, the others traitors. The former we'll enlighten and re-educate, the latter we'll remove.'

'You're undoubtedly right,' the Teacher agreed. 'Hypocrites will call you a fanatic. But can anyone do anything, unless he's blind, without believing that he's absolutely right? If I'm right—perhaps—well, so is my enemy—one enemy—two enemies—three—if each of us possesses only a fragment of the single truth, as those who have been impotent from infancy would have us believe, all that's left is to recognise the facts and then rest on a cushion and scratch your belly until the hour of death. Action begins where the too-clever "buts" finish. I appreciate the full power of your "of course". It means that you've got the whole truth, not merely 99 per cent of the truth; for if some Menshevik or other's got even one per cent he can't be put in the Butyrky prison but must be invited to the Soviet; it means you must consult, discuss, hesitate and cease to act. The bandage round your eyes is a splendid armour against the devil of wisdom, all-acceptance and other forms of Indo-after-dinner

nonsense. Today's *Izvestia* publishes the list of people shot—'

The communist interrupted the Teacher with a cry: 'That's terrible. But it has to be done'. I could not see his face but the tone of his voice made me understand that he was genuinely unhappy about the executions, that his words weren't a diplomatic excuse but the sincere regret of a man who probably had the kindest possible heart and had never personally hurt anyone in all his life.

He went on: 'We're leading humanity towards a better future. Some people, who find this not to their advantage, are hindering us in every way, shooting at us from an ambush, dynamiting our road, lengthening the distance to the longed-for bivouac. We must eliminate them, killing one man to save a thousand. Others resist us because they cannot understand that their own happiness lies ahead, because they're afraid of the heavy march, because they cling to the pitiful shadow of last night's shelter. We are driving them forward, driving them to paradise with iron whips. The Red Army deserter must be shot in order that his children should know the full sweetness of the future Commune'.

He jumped to his feet and began running up and down the room, no longer smiling, and spoke quickly, as if desperately coughing out his words:

'Why are you telling me this? I know it all myself. Do you think it's easy? Easy enough for you who look on! Easy enough for those who obey! Here, *here's* where the hardship and the torment lie. Of course, of course, the historical process, inevitability and so forth. But somebody had to understand, begin, stand at the head of it all. Two years ago they were going about with sharpened poles, roaring and ranting, tearing generals to pieces, cutting out the udders of landowners' cows. A seething, raging sea. Someone had to seize hold of them and direct the full force of their anger, their thirst for a new life towards one clear, definite objective. Here's a rifle for you, coward, stand up and defend the Soviets! Get down to it, idler, build that engine! Sow the fields, mend the roads, turn the screws!

They would put those generals to a horrible death, burn the landowners in their country houses, drown the young officers in the Moyka; then they'd crawl before the ikons on their bellies, repenting and trembling with fear. Then we came. Who are we? I, tens of us, thousands, the organisation, the Party, the power. We took responsibility off their shoulders. From the peasants' huts and the soldiers' barracks we brought it here, to its traditional home, to these accursed palace rooms. I'm not going to fling myself under the ikons, pray away my sins or wash my hands clean. I'm just telling you it's hard. But it's got to be, do you hear? There's no other way.'

Looking round the pillars I saw the Teacher run up to him and kiss his high vaulted forehead. Numb with amazement and terror I began to run. I came to my senses only by the Kremlin gate, where a sentry stopped Jurenito and me to ask for our passes.

'Teacher, why did you kiss him? Was it reverence or pity?'

'No. I always respect the traditions of the country I'm in. And the communists, too, as I've noticed, are very traditional in their habits. As I listened to him I remembered similar precedents in your Dostoyevsky's works, and, maintaining the rules of etiquette, I bestowed on him that ritual kiss on behalf of many.'

## Marcus Aurelius and the Central Authority— Shakse-vaksey

AFTER THAT MIDNIGHT visit Jurenito's position was strengthened and he obtained a high post in the Comintern. As for me, I went on revolutionising rabbits with Durov and receiving half the academic ration for this work. The months passed. I ate millet gruel, at night cherished secret 'contraband' dreams of thick beefsteaks, of Paris cafés—full of light and noise—and of the happy, easy life that was beyond return. Sometimes I felt I couldn't bear it and I would seek support from Jurenito, still as cheerful as ever, though he, too, had grown appallingly thin and was suffering from rheumatism owing to the damp in his room.

He and I used to enjoy walking late at night through the utterly deserted, dead streets with their smoke-covered, dirty houses. Moscow seemed akin to Bruges or Ravenna, a huge mausoleum; and only the sudden desperate hooting of cars and the feverish lights in the windows of various Headquarters and Commissariats reminded us that these were not ruins but a primeval forest, that we were not mourners under a pall of snow but reckless scouts who had thrust forward too far into the unexplored night.

During one of these walks across the Red Square we ran into Alexey Spiridonovich. He had the look of a man who has been finally driven into a corner and has lost all hope. He told us that the spirit was all very well, but that, alas, in addition to the spirit there was also that base organ<sub>1</sub>, the stomach. In short, he had been forced to 'surrender in the unequal struggle' and take a job. He had hesitated for a long time, had considered suicide and escape to the Don until the very last minute, but then he had written a letter to posterity justifying his action

and, in the end, chosen a job which carried a ration slightly better than most others (two pounds of butter). The institution was called *Guvuz* and the job consisted in giving lectures on Russian literature to students taking a course in military economics.

‘Imagine the horror! Barbarians! Who can survive it? And Europe is still silent. I tried telling them about Chehov, about the tender, gentle *zemtsy* dreaming of the kingdom of heaven on earth, but then a Commissar came and told me all that was no use to anybody, it was time to drop those bourgeois whimperings and start writing useful tales of heroes of the labour front who over-fulfilled the quota set by the Central Authority by 100 per cent. He also expressed disapproval of Lermontov’s poem about the angel and recommended instead a certain Demyan Bedny who called on the peasants to exchange potatoes for nails. What’s to be done? It is written: all shall be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Ghost.’

The Teacher remained calm. ‘Your Commissar is obviously a good fellow and not devoid of wit. Won’t you introduce us? I definitely prefer a communist in love with nails to a communist in the role of Lorenzo the Magnificent who snivels with emotion at the “deathless supra-class genius of Lermontov”. What can you do, old chap? You didn’t choose the age to be born in. There’s no doubt you’ve struck the wrong season. I’m very sorry for you, but there’s no point in cursing and invoking history. Believe me, it’s not the first time she’s played a trick of this kind. A day will come when Central Authorities, nails and similar rubbish will be transformed into a marvellous mythology, into glorious epics. I even venture to believe that the shepherd in the Epirus used to heat his broth over the fire before his poetic grandson created Prometheus. This is the age of beginning: that is, of barbarism, wholesale negation, the primitive power of first gestures which enchant—contrary to the rule—not the nervous mother but the self-infatuated infant. Forgive me if I linger a moment longer on the gynaecological track: in order that the child should live you’ve got to cut the

umbilical cord. Then the babe will be raised to its mother's breast and what follows will be the sheerest purple Renaissance. They'll dig your Lermontov out of a miraculously preserved library and they'll gasp: "How wonderful! To think people couldn't understand that".'

Alexey Spiridonovich could not agree. 'They're barbarians, but they lack a lofty spirit, a superior ethic. They have no God. They aren't early Christians but simply vandals. I myself waited with longing for the new revelation, suffered from the materialism of Europe, I myself was ready to fall down—here, on the Red Square—before the stern prophet. But what's that got to do with holy nails and infallible Central Authorities?'

'The answer's simple. You looked for a prophet resembling an idealised version of yourself, i.e. one who studied Solovyev and Dostoyevsky but did not visit tarts in the intervals. Instead, something quite unexpected happened. But remember: did the early Christians appear to the Romans as the bearers of a "great revelation" or as pitiful slaves, with their ignorance, superstitions and primitive morality? Instead of lofty Roman law, the communistic lisp of Jews who had survived the massacre; instead of Homer, the paltry decalogue of a defeated tribe. Nero didn't despise the Christians, you know. He was simply afraid of them. The ones who did despise them were the others—Marcus Aurelius, Pliny—spiritual brothers to your Merezhkovsky. The Central Authorities are the New Testament.

'Look this way—' (we were then passing the Bolshoy Theatre). 'Look at the lights winking on that practically ruined building. What is it? Publicity for a new kind of cigarette? No, it is the tablets of Mount Sinai: *Long live Electrification!* In a country which has worn out its last pair of pants, a country doubled up with the pangs of hunger and typhoid fever, freezing to death in its wooden huts riddled with holes because there aren't any nails—nails, d'you hear, nails, not saints—the crazy slogan is "Electrification". The people gather together, listening to reports, drawing charts. For them these farthing lights shine, illuminating the distant electrified paradise with its dancing



threshers, carefree mills, its groves of smokeless, smiling factories. For the sake of this let the rags and tatters of the last shirt fall to the ground, let the lice eat away the belly swollen with disease, let hundreds of thousands die in the prisons and in the yards of the Cheka. "I believe in the little flame," he cries. How's that for a modern prophet?"

The Teacher's words frightened me inexpressibly. Taking Alexey Spiridonovich—who was moaning quietly—by the arm I led him to my room. We nibbled a crust of bread and tried to comfort each other: perhaps things weren't like that at all but just the opposite. The Communists would be overthrown by a new revolution of the spirit, or else they themselves would change, become benevolent and spiritual, allow me to publish poems about the Mother of God and Alexey Spiridonovich to read lectures on romanticism to his students. We covered ourselves with my sheepskin coat, two old waistcoats and a rug and fell asleep at last.

The following weeks brought a certain amount of distraction. The Teacher, sent to the Caucasus to take part in a Conference of Eastern Peoples, took Aysha and me along with him.

Our journey was extraordinary, for the Teacher, wishing to study the manners and customs of the native population, refused to travel in a sleeper. We forced our way into a goods wagon, but only thanks to the Teacher applying certain methods of French wrestling and to Aysha's warlike bellowings. The company we found in the wagon was jolly and very diversified. Unfortunately, however, for the first fortnight we were obliged to stand, as even a slight movement of the arms provoked protests of indignation from the entire wagon. But by the third day we had become adjusted and learned how to sleep standing up. The train proceeded in a highly original manner, from one lucky chance to another. We would stop by some station shed and dismantle the entire building; the boards would feed the voracious engine for a few hours. When we passed a stretch of forests the passengers would get out and cut down trees. When we saw a sizeable puddle or a small stream we would form a

living chain and pass a bucket from hand to hand, quenching our monster's thirst.

Apart from these peaceful occupations the long days of the voyage were enlivened by military actions. We were attacked four times by different people (we never found out who they were; the Commissar always replied lugubriously that they were "bandits") who fired at us, once—near Harkov—even with a machine-gun. We fired back and just managed to get away. The hucksters travelling on the roofs of the wagons were our sentries. Throughout the journey only four passengers lost their lives, not counting an old man who simply died—I suppose of old age.

Between skirmishes our fellow-travellers, chiefly peasants, would air their views on religion, the construction of roofs, culture and many other matters. No one, at least, could have accused them of lack of originality. According to them, God did not exist, having been invented by the priests for the purpose of funerals, weddings and other ceremonies requiring payment of the clergy, but the churches should be left standing, for what sort of village was it that had no church? It would be better still to kill off all the Jews. As for those who were against the communists—the landlords and princes—not enough of them had been killed yet, and there would have to be more done in that way. But it wouldn't do any harm to knock off a few communists, either. The main thing, however, was to burn all the towns, for that's where trouble and dissension began. But before burning them it would be necessary to salvage any property that might come in useful, roofs for instance—the undamaged bits—men's coats and pianos. That was their programme. As for tactics, the most important thing was to have a small cannon in the village and about a dozen machine-guns. Don't allow any strangers to come near and replace the exchange of goods by raids on trains and the requisitioning of passengers' baggage, which was far more sensible.

Aysha thought very highly of all this. The Teacher, too, far from objecting, expressed sympathetic approval of such projects

and merely advised taking gramophones instead of pianos, as being easier to play and more fun. But I, a townsman who had not, moreover, lacked a certain idealism in his youth, found such conversations repellent. I reproached Jurenito with inconsistency and reminded him of our Moscow talks. 'Don't tell me these grandsons of the rebel Pugachov are the apostles of the organisation of mankind!'

The Teacher replied: 'My dear boy' (let me say here that I was only three years younger than he), 'your naïve honesty is enchanting. Have you only just noticed that I'm a scoundrel, traitor, *agent provocateur*, renegade, etc., etc.? Everything you say reveals that you used to publish your poems in *Russia's Riches* and are fond (don't deny it—I know!) of the high-minded Socialist Revolutionaries. Next thing you'll remember the leader from a Liberal paper and tell me that "he who has said A must say B". Ha! Who's to stop me saying A again, or pulling out the *izhitsa*—the last letter of the Russian alphabet, now abolished—by the ears? What do I care? So much for consistency. Now about the apostles of organisation. All the intellectuals of your country—those who curse the revolution and those who yearn to receive it—still think in terms of marrying the widowed Stenka Razin, not to his Persian princess, but to a complicated version of Communism. Fools! There was one moment—picturesque it is true, but brief—when the paths of the unleashed element and of those who hoped to utilise that element for their own ends coincided: the autumn of Nineteen Seventeen. Since then more than two years have passed, and Razinism, that is to say fury, chaos, the desire for more killing, is now to the communists what timber is to the railway engine. The logs do not give a direction to the train; they feed the engine. Sometimes, if they're a bit damp, the thing slows down; sometimes the heat is such that the boilers burst and the driver goes flying head over heels. The communist revolution today is not revolutionary. It longs for order. Its slogan, from the word go, has not been free rebellion but a solid system. But the fools go on raging, tormenting themselves, wanting

now to set fire to the whole world, now to grow peacefully like young oaks on their hillsides, as their grandfathers did in days long ago. But a sure hand binds them and pitches them into the furnace, to give power to the engine they abhor.'

At last the battles, the peasants' lectures and the Teacher's commentaries came to an end, and we arrived. Happy days followed and, sometimes, sitting with Aysha in an Oriental tavern, I would recall far-off Senegal. In fact I completely forgot to worry about the world's destinies. Everything about us, even the decrees and the incessant shooting, bore a carefree, sleepy, restful character after monastic Moscow. I would go to the public baths where they plastered me with stinking mud, after which the hair on my body disappeared and the reflection in the pool was almost that of a Narcissus. In the taverns I would study magnificent wines—all sorts of *Napareouli* and *Taliani*—which I would drink from a huge horn. I listened to the music of mournful *sazandari* and wild, deafening *duduki*. In short, I almost became an English tourist.

I visited the Conference only once. The large hall was filled with Caucasians in their *cherkesskas*, Afghans in turbans and long oilcloth coats, Bukhars in brightly-coloured skull-caps, Persians in fezzes and many others. All had portraits of Karl Marx with his patriarchal beard pinned to their breasts. A comrade wearing a simple jacket sat in the middle reading out resolutions. The delegates nodded their heads, pressed their hands against their hearts and approved the comrade's wise theses in all possible ways. I heard one Persian sitting in the back row, after hearing a report on the consequences of the economic crisis, say courteously in Russian to a young Indian: 'Killing the British is most agreeable, don't you think?' to which the other, raising his hand to his lips, murmured: 'Most'.

Suddenly a wild music unlike anything else on earth was heard outside the windows: a clanging of brass cymbals, a blare of trumpets. The Persian—the same one who had been dreaming so agreeably in his armchair—leapt to his feet and without

waiting to vote on the 12th 'whereas' of the current resolution ran out into the street. Intrigued, I decided to follow him, the more eagerly since this Conference, colourful though it was, seemed to me unbearably tedious.

I was fully rewarded, for the spectacle which struck my eyes, for all that it has been described many times, was indescribable. Persian women wrapped in black silk rode in litters decorated with bright carpets and gleaming miniatures. Young men were running everywhere, whipped on by horsemen in armour. Behind them walked whole herds of half-naked Persians flagellating their backs—dark blue from the weals—with iron chains. The most extraordinary sight, however, was still to come. Men—youths, respectable fathers of families and frail old men in snowy white robes—marched in rows swaying rhythmically, crying 'Shakse-Vaksey!' and slashing their faces with sabres. The further they went the more frenetic they became, their cries grew more piercing, their blows harder, and the bright, quick blood ran in streams down their faces, their robes, on to the dry red earth. Some fell to the ground, but no one took any notice. My Persian ran into a house and a moment later, dressed in a white robe like all the rest—the resolution still unvoted—he was howling 'Shakse-Vaksey!', filled with supreme ecstasy, and proving with his blood his devotion to something which was foreign and mysterious to me.

The Teacher had also seen this fantastic ceremony, and that night, when Aysha and I were describing our impressions to him, he said: 'Here are more logs. Let's hope they won't blow up the entire engine. Of course the Eastern peoples are highly susceptible to the gifts of civilisation; they will exchange their beautiful jugs for enamel kettles and their carpets for horrible wallpaper. But they've retained something peculiar to themselves. What European, though he may be thrice a believer—never mind in what: the Pope's shoe, world progress, or those delightful Soviets—will so much as scratch himself with a pin in the name of an idea? But these men—not only those in the street, but the delegates too, or rather both together—would

be only too pleased to do a nice big Shakse-Vaksey on a world scale, not only on their own foreheads, of course, but on many others as well; British ones first, by choice, and then . . . Of course an engine is a pretty complicated thing. Your Persian wouldn't know how to build one, but he's perfectly able to destroy it, and not without pleasure.

'Good night, Ehrenburg. Sleep well. Today we have seen some splendid animals let out of their cages for reasons of high strategy. To get them back is more difficult. Who knows? Perhaps it's here that a good steam bath for organised mankind is being prepared. Pleasant dreams!'

## | The survival capacity of an ordinary stick— Schmidt's charts

WE TRAVELLED BACK by sleeper and with a special guard. But an unpleasant—if, by that time, fairly trivial experience awaited us: before reaching Moscow we were arrested by members of one of the varieties of the Cheka, namely the 'Ortocheka', i.e. the Cheka which plied its trade on the railways.

Neither then nor later did we learn the reasons for our arrest. I think that suspicion was aroused by Aysha, who had pinned to his suit across the stomach three red stars, the hammer and sickle, the order of the Red Banner and six medallions bearing portraits of Marx, Engels, Liebknecht, Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev. Be that as it may, we were taken to Moscow in a carriage which was very far from being a sleeper and placed in the Butyrky prison, where I had been confined once before, at the age of sixteen, for issuing a strike proclamation to Moscow schoolboys.

I was then able to note that during the years of great upheaval the prison had shown the maximum stability by undergoing no change whatsoever. The warders still hung about outside the peepholes and fingered one's body in a vile fashion when making a search. The smell of latrine buckets was as foul as ever, and so was that of the prison slops clinging eternally to the greenish tin bowls. Even the company we found ourselves in was curiously reminiscent of the past: some Menshevik or other was defending Marxism against the excesses of maximalism. They took you away for questioning or to see a visitor through two rows of bars, sometimes they tried you, sometimes they shot you, sometimes they shouted: 'Here, take your things', and discharged you.

I was greatly surprised by such continuity. The Teacher, on the contrary, found it perfectly natural.

‘A stick’s a stick whoever’s wielding it,’ he comforted me. ‘It can hardly transform itself into a mandolin or a Japanese fan. A Government without a prison is a perverse and unpleasant notion, rather like a tomcat with clipped claws.’

‘Once upon a time there were two little men living in the Butyrky area, Comrade Ivan and Comrade Pyotr. The former was a Bolshevik and worked on the Moscow Committee of the R.S.D.R.P., the latter was a Menshevik and belonged to the Moscow Organisation of the R.S.D.R.P. They lived quite peacefully, which means that they attended meetings together, spent nights in hiding in the flats of sympathiser lawyers, were sometimes imprisoned together here, in the Butyrky prison, and argued until they practically lost their voices, for Ivan was in favour of sharing out the land and Pyotr of municipalising it, but since the land wasn’t in the hands of either Ivan or Pyotr but of the landowners they soon became reconciled, united, and disunited again: in short, it was an idyllic marriage, not Ivan and Pyotr but *Paul et Virginie*. Then a few things changed; Ivan entrenched himself in the Kremlin and began composing, not just resolutions for five intelligent printworkers, as hitherto, but decrees binding on 150 million Russians. Pyotr read the decrees and did not like them. He wanted to have an argument as in the good old days, but at the “holy Kremlin gates” a soldier stopped him and said “no admittance without a pass”. So he rallied five equally intelligent printworkers and persuaded them to protest. Ivan heard about it and got angry. And, since by that time Ivan was already in possession of this marvellous age-old stick, he did not argue, did not exclude Pyotr from any party, but called in “certain persons” and simply gave an order, wasting no words. Whereupon everything went on as smoothly as if it had been oiled: Pyotr tried to hide, spent nights in lawyers’ flats, Ivan’s men hunted him, caught him and finally brought him back here, to his old residence.

‘You think that’s shocking? You’re indignant? My friend,



how wrong you are! Do you really think Pyotr would have acted otherwise? Even if his name had not been Pyotr but Valentine or Maximilian he still wouldn't have managed without "certain persons". To rule without them is like sitting on a stool with one leg missing: an original idea no doubt, but you won't stay there more than a minute. All the rest follows quickly. Make Ercole king of Italy and you'll see: even before he's had time to put on a pair of trousers he'll be ordering people about: "Hey, you there!" Years will pass—not years but whole ages, whole epochs—and humanity will be lined up many more times for the last parade, and every time some Persian will unexpectedly transform those parades into jolly Shakse-Vakseys, until the remnants of the human race will understand at last that it doesn't matter who wields the stick, it is only the stick itself that matters, until they stop changing things and make a clean sweep at last. But in the meantime let's eat our slops, or they'll get quite cold.'

No doubt we would have remained in prison for a long time—for no one seemed to take the slightest interest in us—if the latest piece of ill-luck had not been succeeded by another chance, this time a lucky one. A special Commission of the Moscow Soviet arrived to inspect the prison. We pinned no hopes on it because many other Commissions and delegations had visited us already. But when Schmidt entered our cell I actually began to crow with pleasure. For a second time fate had sent him to our rescue. Thereafter everything happened very simply: a telephone call, a couple of words between friends, and an hour later, with many apologies, we were passing through the prison gate which, though old, was still in excellent condition.

The rumours we had heard of Schmidt's progress turned out to be true. From a general in the army of the German Reich to a gloomy Spartakist in a patched coat may seem a surprisingly long cry, but it should be remembered that even as a student Schmidt had always said that he could become a violent German patriot or an extreme socialist, for both pursued the goal, dear

to his heart, of organising mankind. Arriving in Russia as a convinced German nationalist, he had spent the first few months doing all he could to assist Germany's victory. But after the October revolution new horizons, broad and more enticing, had opened before him. He had decided that the Communist International could subject Europe to a unified plan more surely than the wavering Reich, whose power was already shaken. In the past he had been a frenzied chauvinist and a fanatical monarchist, but he now supported the new cause honestly, without any *arrière-pensée*, and with all the obstinacy and forthrightness of his nature. He had been wounded twice while fighting the Whites. He lived in extreme outward poverty, worked eighteen hours a day, had turned down the offer of an official car although he was wounded in the leg—so that he was obliged to hobble from one Commissariat to another—and was, in short, in all respects an honourable and consistent communist.

The day after our liberation we went to visit Schmidt in his office. The walls were hung with charts, each more strange and elaborate than the next. Schmidt was snowed under with plans, blueprints and drawings. He began telling us with fervour about his work. Up till now, people had expended their efforts in an arbitrary fashion: everything had been haphazard and irrational. Japan and Holland were overcrowded to the point of suffocation, while Siberia and Spain were practically deserted. In the black soil regions of Russia they had tipped wheat into the water because they wouldn't sell it for a few kopeks and desperately tried to keep up the falling prices, while in Peking coolies died of hunger. In England so much cotton was produced that there wasn't anywhere to put it, the crisis began and the workers starved by their idle machines, whilst men in Kaluga still dreamt of owning one new pair of underpants. Poets ran from one newspaper office to another begging the editors to publish their poems, even at five kopeks a line, but there weren't enough agronomists. The number of lawyers was higher than that of criminals, yet sometimes you couldn't find an electrician.

It was chaos, insensate and wild, an economic system of drovers coming home blind drunk from the fair or of apes dressed in frock-coats. Now everything was to be different. This map here showed how many people should live where, exactly, down to the last square metre.

Another chart showed the distribution of the working population by professions. The country needed so many engineers, so many plumbers, so many poets. No deviation permitted. Tula would know that according to the plan for 1930 it must produce 80 doctors, 7 artists, 600 metalworkers, 350 potters and so on. A child would be trained from infancy to love the calling assigned to it. An industrial ABC for schools would be produced, in which every letter would be illustrated by the tools of a particular trade. The total number of births would also be subject to precise planning and must correspond to quotas laid down centrally. The family must be abolished; children could not be left under the accidental and harmful influence of parents, i.e. irresponsible persons. The infants' homes, schools and labour colonies would prepare new generations of workers. At the next stage, hostels, communal feeding, equalised distribution. On finishing work for the day everyone would have the right to go to the entertainments distribution centre of the district to which he was attached. There he could get his prescribed doses of aesthetic emotion: music, choral declamation, festivals following exact scenarios to replace the theatre. Finally, sexual excesses would also be put under restraint; a special commission of doctors under the Narkomzdrav was already working on this. And that would be man's life.

Schmidt showed us his most mysterious chart of all, looking like the roots of a giant plant. Man's life!

I remembered the simple-hearted cheap prints of my youth: a boy at play, a youth in love holding a flower in his hand, the father of a family caressing his child, a mature man—always represented, heaven knows why, with a goosequill in his hand—and a decrepit old man tottering towards an open 'coffin. Here

we saw nothing of the kind. White squares merged into green pyramids which, in turn, radiated out into red circles, the circles became rhomboids, and so it went on, long and elaborate, with no restful grave to be seen but only black triangles representing settlements for veterans of the labour front.

As he showed us all these stages and transitions, reeling off hundreds of figures and names of organising centres, Schmidt said with emotion: 'Here's life for you! No longer a mystery, a fairy-tale, a feverish vision, but a work-process, broken up into its components here, in this poor small room, and reconstructed by the power of reason'.

I remembered another poor small room, an attic in Stuttgart, the timetables on the wall, the sixty marks and Frau Hase. But the rattling typewriters, the secretary incessantly bringing in papers for signature, the queue of visitors in the ante-room told me that this was no childish fancy but a giant workshop for the construction of a new world.

I was ready to burst into tears out of sheer horror, but burst into laughter instead, unexpectedly and almost indecently, as the words of a popular jingle reached me from the street:

*'If I go to the shit-house without a permit  
I'll get into trouble, alas.  
I'd be only too happy to get a permit,  
But there's no one to issue the pass.'*

Then Schmidt had a talk with the Teacher about his work and suggested that he might undertake the organisation of the most difficult and chaotic field of all, that of the arts. Jurenito was delighted with the suggestion and everything was settled within a few minutes.

When we had come away I started telling Jurenito what I thought of Schmidt and his charts: 'It may all be very brilliant, but what's it got to do with the life of a man? It's nothing but tiny cogs going round.'

The Teacher replied: 'No, it is new man, as different from you as an inhabitant of the Cameroons or some such place.

You haven't noticed that a new race of men has arisen out of the very depths of a way of life which seemed unshakeable. They have their own psychology, their own morality, their own religious sense. The men of the past used to bow down before the incomprehensible, the mysterious and accidental. Any deviation from the usual—from that which had been empirically explained—was raised to divine status and called a miracle. The new men worship the inherent laws governing phenomena, their sober ecstasy is reserved for the infallible logic of work, ideas, events. You can easily understand the primitive ecstasy of the fire-worshipper squatting in his frosty cave and watching the tongues of flame come sweeping out of the hearth. Now try to understand another kind of ecstasy: that of a mechanic who has just grasped for the first time the workings of a complicated machine'.

We were walking through my favourite little alleys between Prechistenka and the Arbat. The tiny houses with their front gardens, the lilac, the onion domes of the little church of the Assumption over by the Mogiltsy, all this supported me in my protest.

'Teacher, the new men you speak of are monstrous and therefore impossible. In their lives there's no room for chance and therefore for the most beautiful thing of all: the unexpected, the contradictory, the romantic, none of all that. There are millions of Schmidts without even the tiniest Napoleon among them. What boredom!'

'That's too bad. You'll have to content yourself with being bored for a while, for you're a man of the old species. Old things always smell of putrescence and mothballs, but that particular smell is highly valued under the name of "romanticism". We've said goodbye to abbots and Madonnas and Highnesses, haven't we? And we've managed well enough without them. And so they'll say goodbye to the charming eccentricities of American multi-millionaires, the picturesque beauty of rags, the gloss of luxury, the cinema attraction of having to fight for a crust of bread or a mountain of gold. All

the things you're anxious to preserve—the whim and the chance—are rotting away fast, and soon they won't even smell any more. Of course you're free—if you rent a separate room where your neighbours can't hear you—to weep over their demise for the rest of your days, but that isn't likely to change anything.

'Have you seen the Cubists' paintings? After the Impressionists' divine vagaries, there you have precise, carefully thought-out constructions of form, closely akin to Schmidt's charts.

'Have you seen the war? What did you find there—Napoleons, Davids, grand gestures, the self-sacrifice of heroic standard-bearers—or Mr Cool's model economy?

'For all your muddle-headedness you're fond of playing chess. Can't you see how the combination game is yielding to a game of position? Instead of unexpected combinations, the noble sacrificial gambit, there's a precise, economical, closely reasoned plan. I'm surprised that you should be so blind. You poke your nose into everything, yet you fail to notice the most fundamental, the most undeniable features of modern life.'

'If what you say is true,' I cried with indignation, 'what's the use of living? And, in particular, what's the use of copying out Schmidt's decrees, instead of trying to destroy him in some way or other?'

'If, at dawn, you start firing at the sun from a thousand batteries, it'll rise nonetheless. It may be that I hate this dawning day as much as you do. But, in order that tomorrow may come, you must steadfastly meet the cruel sun, you must help mankind to walk in its rays, instead of clinging to the cupola of some little church which yesterday—yesterday or some other time in the past—gleamed warmly in the dying sunset.'

## CHAPTER XXX | 'Artistic freedom' or the counter-revolutionaries' intrigues

THE MEETING of the Arts Commission was attended by, in addition to the Teacher, the wives of important communists, various minor but honest communists who liked to keep their hands clean, actors, chiefly from among former leading players of His Imperial Majesty's theatres, and painters who had spent all their lives painting eighteenth-century *marquises* in crinolines. The chairman of the Commission was a certain highly revolutionary personage who had once terrified some aged professors so badly that they had almost scattered to the four corners of the earth and only their desire to save their *alma mater* had held them back; but in fact he was a good-natured, fat fellow, an excellent family man, with a gold chain across his stomach and a noble passion for the arts. He adored Balmont's *Liturgy of Beauty* and was in the habit of commissioning painters—no, not Futurists but those who had recently painted the wives of Moscow grain merchants and the mistresses of Grand Dukes—to do portraits of himself alone (fighter for an idea), himself with wife (another fighter), his wife and baby (motherhood), himself and wife in the family circle (fighter resting). All these portraits were endowed with expression and bronze frames.

The Commission was to discuss the question of how to adapt the arts for purposes of agitation and propaganda without destroying the creative impulse. The chairman spoke at length on the lofty heritage of culture, on the giants of the human spirit, and finally proposed a compromise solution: creative artists who produced works of propaganda value should receive a calorie ration equal to two academic rations. All others, without infringing the freedom of inspiration, would be issued with simple rations on the category B labour card.

Jurenito was the next to speak. He started straight off with a radical proposal: to abolish the arts. Here is what he said in defence of the recommended measure:

‘What you are suggesting is only a new shop sign over old rubbish, or a camphor injection administered to an already cooling corpse. Why have you abolished religion if you still want someone to surround the sturdy cudgel of your power with the nimbus of poetry? Is a calorie-stuffed caste of privileged priests in the service of an official art better than the old kind of priest with crosses on their bellies? What will you get? A dozen official poets who will manufacture—I beg your pardon, create—odes to God, the swallow, and all sorts of other things which do not come into the plan of State construction. All the poems, tragedies, pictures and symphonies made according to prescription will be poorer and weaker than the old ones, and the simple citizen, comparing them with Pushkin, Shakespeare and El Greco will decide that it’s all the fault of modern life and communism. This cannot be allowed to happen. By destroying the arts we must show the world that they and they alone are guilty because they tried to outlive themselves, thus meriting a bullet in the behind instead of an honourable death in the family four-poster.

‘The giants of the human spirit whom we heard mentioned here were unquestionably guilty of high treason because they undermined the foundations of rational and sober existence. Of course from our point of view there’s nothing criminal in undermining the Queen of England, a German prince or Tsar Nicholas I; on the contrary, we think it’s highly praiseworthy. Alas, comrades, you are making a mistake if you think it mattered one jot to the artists what precisely they were undermining. Not a bit of it! Whether Naples was the kingdom of an ancient despot or a communist colony, Vesuvius would go on erupting just the same. Tomorrow the giants of yesterday to whom you erect monuments because you refuse to abandon hallowed tradition, and those of today for whom you spare neither confectioners’ goods nor fats, will start undermining your society.



The arts are the focal point of anarchy. Artists are heretics, sectarians, dangerous rebels.

‘And so we must unhesitatingly ban the arts as we have banned the manufacture of intoxicating spirits and the import of opium. It will be all the easier to do so as the decrepit arts themselves are trying to end their inglorious old age by suicide. They try to become dissolved in life, thus giving us an excellent opportunity to end the dangerous epidemic. We know that certain gases, when concentrated in one spot, threaten to explode at any moment, causing fires and asphyxiation; but being dispersed in the atmosphere they become innocuous.

‘Look at modern painting. It turns its back on the image, pursuing aims which are exclusively constructional, transforming itself into a laboratory of forms which can perfectly well be achieved in everyday life. The crime of El Greco, Giotto, Rembrandt was that their images could *not* be achieved in everyday life; they were unique and therefore useless. The pictures of the Cubists or Suprematists can be used for a variety of purposes—as plans for kiosks on the boulevards, as wall-paper designs, as models for new shoes, and so on. All we have to do is to impart the right direction to this trend; we must prohibit the practice of art as such, so that the picture-frame should not tempt the painter once more to the madness of the image. We must attach the painters to various branches of production. The usual arts will cease to have an independent life and thus to threaten society; instead, they will supply the trappings of communist life, houses, plates, trousers. Instead of Picasso’s daubings, a good constructivist chair.

‘The same applies to the other arts. Poetry is adopting the language of the newspapers and business conversations; it is shedding skin after skin—rhyme, quantity, image, rhetoric, tradition, last of all, metre. It remains naked and unadorned, so that great professional experience is needed to understand why certain modern poems are poems rather than a newspaper leader or an advertisement for *Spermin*. Therefore the problem’s very simple: all we have to do is prohibit the printing of

books with an uneconomical distribution of lines, as traditionally practised by poets in the past, and delete the word "poet"—which might lead men into temptation—from the dictionary. The theatre is breaking its own armour, the footlights; it is moving down into the pit or into the public square, dragging the audience on to the stage, destroying the author and the actor. It could be finally reduced to powder within twenty-four hours, by way of all the intermediate stages of festivals, demonstrations and so forth. Later even these organised pageants will become plain, everyday events, dissolve themselves into gestures, postures and jokes.

'In Kineshma I tried to implement the liquidation of the arts, but I was stopped by the petty bourgeois aestheticism of many revolutionaries. I am sure that you will accept my proposal, and today will be the date of the death of one of mankind's insanities, which has long prevented it from settling down comfortably on this earth.'

There was a flood of protest.

'We aren't barbarians!' the chairman boomed.

'We love the beautiful,' cooed the wives.

'Those in favour?'

Jurenito's was the only vote. The proposal was rejected.

The decision was to let the arts live and, by adjusting the range of rations, to try and guide the creative impulse into the channels of communism. The Teacher smiled: 'You might as well try to use a tornado to operate a windmill'.

Alone with me, he confessed: 'My proposal was entirely logical and correct, but there is a "but"—the presence of Ercole in Schmidt's retinue. You and I won't shed any tears over it, but it'll cause a lot of trouble for the great and small policemen of tomorrow's world. They have decided to light their cigarettes with lightning instead of with expensive Swedish matches. My proposal was that it would be better to concentrate on making matches ourselves, abolishing lightning altogether for the peace of mind of communist children. But, of course, that wouldn't have stopped lightning, some fine

summer's noon from striking the bald head of a man happily convinced that thunderstorms were liquidated forever by decree. Meanwhile let us observe the results of their activities'.

During the next weeks Moscow was shaken by a series of strange and regrettable incidents which served as brilliant confirmation of the Teacher's solemn warnings to the aesthetes of the Arts Commission. The composer Krys, whose music had, until then, been unknown even to the professionals, wrote a symphony entitled *Titan Stretching*. It was performed before an audience of thousands. But, instead of an educative effect, this music produced the most reprehensible emotions. The next day the Soviet institutions were deserted, for none of the people who had heard the symphony turned up for work. More than that, many refused to shovel snow in the streets, weeping, shrieking and making incoherent noises. One man, completely crazed, shouting that he could no longer bear to sit in an office stamping orders for goloshes, climbed up on a roof and hurled a spanner at a militiaman, giving him severe concussion. In the end he was killed attempting to escape. *Izvestia* wrote: 'Another instance of sabotage. The work of Mensheviks in capitalist pay'. Krys, the chief culprit, came to no harm whatsoever and was actually given a hundred thousand roubles and twenty-five loose cigarettes as his fee for the concert.

No sooner had the papers stopped writing about sabotage when a new unpleasantness occurred. A young poet called Yershov contrived—by collaring a printer's allocation through a co-operator of the name of Hailov—to publish a book of verse under the title *Come Worship the Red Stallion*. It contained the incoherent ravings of the last dreamer munching millet from a nosebag who, fancying himself a foal, had begun to neigh in something resembling verse. The book had an extraordinary success; the whole edition was sold out within a few days. Soon a new sect was formed, with a membership composed predominantly of women, who called themselves 'foals'. One wet morning, instead of sewing pants for the Red Army as was their duty on the labour front, they came

out on the Tverskaya neighing, and, questioned by militiamen who appeared on the scene as to where precisely they were going, began to kick. The papers reported: 'Another priest-inspired demonstration'.

Finally, a Red Army man called Krivenko, a former theological student, attempted to blow up the Spassky barracks with an old hand-grenade, injuring the little finger of one hand in the process. On being arrested he explained in stumbling words, but with engaging sincerity, that a few days earlier he and some of his comrades had been taken to a museum where he had seen some extraordinary pictures: houses flying in all directions, purple women cut into fragments, seven cups on a single saucer and some terrifying orange-coloured squares. This had made him understand something, though he wasn't quite sure what. Anyhow, returning to the barracks, smelling the odour of socks and seeing the bed-boards, kitbags and mess tins, he had decided all at once that these two worlds were incompatible and that one of them must perish. He was accordingly declared a Socialist Revolutionary, but since it was not known whether he was right-wing or left-wing he was sent off to a certain place for identification.

There an attempt was made to link all three incidents and orders were issued to arrest a couple of thousand doubtful persons. Yershov happened to be among them but was immediately released, being a poet.

It would seem that, after all these melancholy happenings, the only reasonable thing would have been to remember the Teacher's advice and proceed to the destruction of the arts. Instead, the wrath of the authorities was turned upon some perfectly mild characters doing no harm to anyone, who once upon a time—before socialism and the revolution—had been socialists and revolutionaries, and who now suffered from nostalgia for the Constituent Assembly and the old-fashioned police, a nostalgia as nagging and continuous as a toothache.

Jurenito, too, received a few black looks and decided that a change of climate would not come amiss. We took counsel

among ourselves and decided to go South, taking Aysha along for reinforcement and, for humanitarian reasons, Alexey Spiridonovich and Monsieur Delet as well. Our martyr had, thank goodness, recovered and been discharged from the asylum, but Alexey Spiridonovich, profoundly depressed by the incompatibility of the freedom of the spirit with a food ration, was almost ready to take his place. Both clearly needed a rest.

At the last moment we were joined by Mr Cool who wanted to get to the Ukraine in order to buy a few more 'dead souls', or rather nationalised sugar factories.

Since it was unthinkable to go to a holiday resort, we simply took a chance, getting Aysha to put his finger anywhere on the map. The place we settled on was Yelizavetgrad. We wasted no time thinking it over, equipped ourselves with five good travel warrants, got into a 'delegates' carriage, and slowly, without undue haste, departed for our unknown *villegiatura*.

| Eleven governments—  
Jurenito as Pretender  
to the Russian throne

SOMEHOW OR OTHER we managed to get to Yelizavetgrad in only three weeks. After a good night's sleep we decided to look round the town where fate had brought us as to a promised land. However, no sooner had we left the house than we were stopped by a patrol which demanded to see our papers. Jurenito proudly held out an impressive document stating that we had been sent to the town of Yelizavetgrad on official business, namely that of investigating the musical instruments to be found there. After reading the paper carefully the soldier showed it to his companion and both—for some unknown reason—conceived a powerful desire to shoot us. The Teacher's assurances that the paper bore the signature of the *upravdel*, or departmental chief, himself merely confirmed them in their incomprehensible wish.

We were taken along to Headquarters. Certain that the misunderstanding would be cleared up at once, we walked along cheerfully, admiring the sunlight splashed on the mud of the little streets, signs saying 'Gents' Tailor' decorated with magnificent dark men, and happy carefree boys throwing fragments of a bottle at a lousy hairless bitch: in short, all the innocent joys of a small charming town.

Suddenly, as we were nearing the Headquarters, I cried out: 'They've got epaulettes!'

'What does that mean?' Monsieur Delet asked carelessly.

'It means they're really going to shoot us.'

Realising that the men before us were not Bolsheviks, Mr Cool brightened up: 'Do not worry, my friends. I'll have no trouble coming to terms with respectable people'. And indeed he acted as our spokesman with the lieutenant who interrogated

us, explaining that he was the owner of many enterprises and had fled from the accursed land of the Soviets to save himself, his soul and his dollars. Monsieur Delet and Jurenito were his partners, Alexey Spiridonovich and I his clerks, and Aysha his manservant. Supported by an American passport all this seemed to me highly convincing, but the lieutenant, though a little hesitant, was still in favour of having us shot.

Mr Cool decided to bring up his big battalions. He took out a Bible and solemnly read to the lieutenant: 'The Fifth Commandment: Thou shalt not kill'. The lieutenant replied that he wasn't a godless swine; he believed in God—here he even crossed himself—but all that sort of thing was for honest people, not Bolsheviks and Jews, who should be killed at every opportunity, like mad dogs. The packet of dollars obtained by Mr Cool with Grossmann's assistance in Moscow had a much more positive effect. It meant far more to the lieutenant than our travel document or the Bible, and he let us go.

Holiday life in Yelizavetgrad proved to be most unusual and it took us some time to get used to it. The fact was that the opponents of the Bolsheviks differed favourably from them by their diversity. They included supporters of 'Single and Undivided' Russia, just Ukrainians, Ukrainian Socialists, just Socialists, Anarchists, Poles and not less than three dozen major Atamans, not counting the minor ones who kept themselves going by train robberies and village pogroms. They all fought, not only the Bolsheviks but also each other, seizing our residence for short periods in turn. In three months we saw a succession of eleven different Governments. You had to be the Teacher, with his unique Mexican experience, to see your way even moderately clear in that muddle. Leaving the house in the mornings we used not to know who held the town; and just in case, we kept all the pockets of our coats, waistcoats and trousers stuffed with an enormous variety of documents in many languages and dialects, eagles with and without crowns, sickles, tridents, and even hayforks which were the emblem of 'Little Father' Shilo.

I should point out, however, that this diversity found expression almost exclusively in flags and emblems and had no effect whatsoever on the life of the town. The townspeople, liberated every week from one yoke or another, did not even notice it, for the actions of the tyrants and the liberators were surprisingly alike. Moreover, everybody wore the same grey uniform left over from Tsarist times. Besides, the tradition of places proved stronger than human change: the furnished rooms which had housed the Cheka were later used by the 'counter-intelligence' and all the ten subsequent institutions of the same kind. The prison went on being the prison, though people who had put others in it were always being put in it themselves: it did not become a musical academy or a kindergarten for all that. Even the shootings were carried out on the same traditional waste ground behind the prison. Each successive regime, as it came in, issued laws on the freedom and inviolability of the individual and the death penalty for the slightest expression of dissatisfaction with that freedom. Then, for the duration of their short butterfly existence, they would hasten to 'establish normal living conditions', i.e. rob the greatest possible number of Jewish watchmakers and shoot all persons with unprepossessing faces or ill-sounding surnames.

One day, sitting in a small, dirty coffee-shop which, thanks to the quick-wittedness of its Greek owner, was able to provide an island of rest amid the raging ocean outside, the Teacher inquired: 'What Government have we got today? Ukrainian, isn't it?'

The Greek hissed back nervously: 'What are you saying! We're all Little Russians and our Government's the Rostov Government. The Romanov currency has risen no end, but the Ukrainian's selling at three for a hundred, even worse than Soviet money'.

"  
'That makes me feel younger,' laughed Jurenito, 'whoever would have thought I'd return practically to the conditions of my homeland in my old days?'

Aysha asked: 'Master, tell Aysha, Aysha very stupid, Aysha



no understand why they all say they no like each other, yet all do same thing, just like brothers?’

‘Dear Aysha, you aren’t stupid at all, you’re much too wise. Forget the heights of your African philosophy. You’re trying to find a difference where there can be none. Listening to speeches and looking at flags is all very well for you savages; we cultured people are more interested in different types of machine-guns. Of course it would be more intelligent if they all united for these operations, but the sense of solidarity has no roots in this particular trade. I can well imagine all the advantages of a “trade union of workers endeavouring to seize power”. What an economy of time and strength! Each section would get a town for a month, thin out the population, fight luxury, raise the output of printers and signwriters by publishing a new code of laws and introducing the new spelling on all signboards or restoring the old, then quietly pick up its banners, law codes and other belongings and move on to the next town, leaving the place free for their comrade-enemies. Unfortunately the ground isn’t yet ready for such a union and you must reconcile yourself to the fact that, besides the lawful prey—namely the ordinary citizens—the rivals also senselessly kill each other.’

And all the time—on the quiet days, that is, those without gunfire—that we wandered about the town, drank coffee at the Greek’s and talked philosophy, Mr Cool and Monsieur Delet, wasting no time, discussed something with great concentration.

The sequel of these tête-à-têtes was unexpected. One calm morning well suited for idyllic walks, our two respectable friends came into Alexey Spiridonovich’s room and Monsieur Delet said with solemnity, but also with a certain warmth: ‘The great hour has struck! Dear Monsieur Tishin, you have been mobilised’.

Alexey Spiridonovich, who was still lying dreamily abed, leapt up shouting: ‘What are you saying? Good God! Mobilised? By whom?’

Mr Cool replied importantly: ‘Not by us, of course. We

aren't interfering in your country's internal affairs. We only hired a certain retired sergeant for the purpose, and he signed the order. My friend, you mustn't grieve. Rejoice, for you're going to defend culture and liberty against the barbarians'.

Then they both withdrew, leaving behind them the mobilisation order and two dollars for Alexey Spiridonovich's outfit. Alexey Spiridonovich, who had once already defended culture from the barbarians, fell back on his bed and began wailing at the top of his voice, which he continued to do until evening when the Teacher and I arrived upon the scene.

He told us all about his torments. Of course the Bolsheviks were barbarians and should be overthrown. But he was against violence, he was almost a Tolstoyan; it wasn't for nothing that his Saint Sophia campaign had ended with the death of Aysha's brother. Besides, he was afraid to fire at Russians, his own people. True, Monsieur Delet had assured him that the Red Army consisted of anything but Russians: Bashkirs, Kirghizes, Jews, Hungarians, Chinese and Lithuanians. But what if, by chance, there happened to be among them even a single brother-Russian? Lord, Lord, what should he do then?

But there was nothing he could do. Having received a rifle and a tricolour flag from Monsieur Delet and, from Mr Cool, a Bible and another dollar, Alexey Spiridonovich went off with thirty other 'volunteers'—burning, like himself, with the desire for battle—to seize the village of Dyrky from the Reds.

Following a heroic attack in which they lost twenty-three men, the volunteers occupied the village and the adjacent sugar factory. To Alexey Spiridonovich's utmost horror and dismay he was obliged to bayonet a Russian, and all the corpses he found at Dyrky looked less like Chinese than peasants from Tula or Kaluga. His torments redoubled.

To crown it all, Mr Cool and Monsieur Delet arrived at Dyrky to greet and thank the glorious fighters. Mr Cool explained that he had acquired Kutumenko's factory dirt cheap and Monsieur Delet reminded the *paysans libérés* of the necessity to work with all their might to pay off Russia's debts, to

which was now added the cost of thirty rifles, two flags and the sergeant's pay.

All this had such a strong effect on Alexey Spiridonovich that he fled from Dyrky by night, straight to the Teacher's flat, exchanged his rifle for two bottles of home-distilled vodka and insisted on declaiming *To Russia's Slanderers* in a drunken state. Aysha had to take the part of a 'slanderer' and receive annihilating glances, a spray of saliva and even an occasional tap from Alexey Spiridonovich's hand.

From that day on Alexey Spiridonovich was obliged to hide, particularly from the sergeant and Monsieur Delet. He grew dreadfully thin and dilapidated. He would lie for days in the Teacher's larder, dreaming of how lovely it would be if to Kerensky's freedom you could add Schmidt's organisation, the dollar and the higher soul peculiar to the Slavs. But as things stood they were very bad.

My own position was no better. I have a Semite's lips and a dubious surname. Under such circumstances I ran the risk at any moment of ending my difficult progress on this earth against the peeling wall of some outhouse in Yelizavetgrad.

One night some officers stopped me in the street. 'Halt! Are you a Yid?' In reply I swore, juicily and going into great detail, just like a shoemaker in Dorogomilovo might swear when he's been paid for an order and had a bit to drink. This seemed convincing and they let me go.

Another fellow in uniform turned up at the Teacher's flat—where I too was living—and started screaming: 'Yids! You crucified Christ! You sold Russia!' Then, without any transition, in a businesslike tone: 'This cigarette-case is silver, isn't it?'

Even the Teacher had to pay the penalty. On one of the traditional 'three days' when this new sport was especially popular, he went out for a walk. In the street he ran across an officer apparently frozen in a dreamy pose.

'Yid! Come here!'

'I'm a Mexican.'

'In that case I apologise. Perhaps you could tell me where I might find a single Yid?'

'Try looking for one.'

'That's the whole trouble. They're all hiding—I've been standing here since morning'; and, contenting himself with the Teacher's fur cap, the unlucky sportsman went off in search of the rare game.

Generally speaking, the Teacher, too, was in low spirits. Already during the last months in Moscow I had begun to notice in him a certain tiredness and apathy. Still he kept going and struck up friendships with many of the White Russians who stayed in the town longer than the rest.

One of them, Second-Lieutenant Ushkov, was a touching and delightful adolescent. He was mad on the romanticism of the past, on the bugle calls of the Old Guard, the victorious fluttering of a great army's banners. His ideas were general and meagre, but he was driven by a strong and mystic love of the past. A hundred things—the battle of Kulikovo, Palm Sunday with its lights dancing through the streets and alleys of old Moscow, the cathedrals of the Kremlin, dances with his sister's friends the *institutkas*, the Patriotic War of 1812, Mamma and the traditional Christmas tree—merged in his mind into one passionately adored whole, which wicked strangers had taken away. The Teacher said of him: 'Here's Pushkin's Yevgeny, the poor crank who will not wait until the horse-man's flesh becomes transmuted into bronze. Whose fault is it if Julio Jurenito, pushing the scenario-writer aside, has come upon the scene five centuries before he was supposed to, whilst gentle Ushkov was born as many years too late, skipping the first Romanovs and the magnificent officers who fell on the fields of Borodino, turned the Parisiennes' heads with their dancing and their moustaches, and were in love both with their own Natashas and with Liberty, that foreign freemason's daughter?'

In the same regiment as Ushkov there served a certain Davilov, a young landowner, a passionate gambler but a man of sober thinking. He referred to Ushkov as 'that schoolgirl'.

'Everything's clear and simple, and no romantic nonsense about it: it's either us or them. I'd rather be killed by a bullet than lead a "proletarian" existence, mouthing a jargon I detest. If we win we'll live, live properly, like our fathers and grand-fathers before us, with receptions given by the marshal of the nobility, with drinking parties in the *Strelnya*, with thousand-rouble notes on the green cloth, with verve and dash, recklessness and style. If not, we'll perish and then the "comrades" will come and spread such utter boredom for centuries to come that even pure-blooded Russian flies will die of sheer misery.'

Jurenito's third friend, a Cossack officer, was a fellow of unusual height with a giant's legs, nicknamed The Tank. He regarded the Civil War as a dangerous but fascinating sport. He chased commissars, Atamans, anyone he could catch, and for the tenth or hundredth time the diamond earrings of Yagoditseva, the merchant's wife, or the pounds sterling of Eisenstein, the speculator, would change hands.

'A real genuine Mexican,' the Teacher would say with pride, thumping The Tank on his massive back as he displayed his latest trophy, a gold leaf bracelet. 'You're not five centuries too late, my friend, but only three years. Back in Nineteen Seventeen you'd have had all the fun you wanted. But now it won't do; now the Schmidts have got the thing so well organised that you'd get sent to unload railway trucks, and what's more the crates would all be counted.'

Despite the friendships with the officers I have described, the Teacher was not left in peace. Now it would be the 'counter-intelligence' anxious to find out what precisely he had been doing on July 12th, 1915, now the Ossetians would come for the hundredth time to establish his religion, picking up an old pair of trousers or a tea-set on the way.

Perhaps because of all this, perhaps simply out of boredom, the Teacher decided to act and—to everyone's surprise—proclaimed himself a Pretender to the Russian throne. He proved that he was related to Maximilian, the executed Mexican

Emperor who had been a descendant of the Hapsburgs, who in turn were related to the Danish royal family and, consequently, to the Romanovs.

Jurenito made his intention of occupying the empty throne known to the local 'counter-intelligence', *Osvag* and the foreign powers. The 'counter-intelligence' ceased its vexatious visits and one of its members actually brought the Teacher a bottle of Martell brandy, which we emptied not without pleasure. *Osvag* exhibited Jurenito's portrait in its shop window, but diplomatically omitted to say anything about the throne for fear of hurting the feelings of certain tame socialists. From abroad the Teacher received some telegrams wishing him success, as well as 100 francs for petty expenses. We got Mr Cool to exchange this money for 100,000 roubles and blued it in truly royal style. Aysha was so impressed by all the drink, and particularly by the Turkish delight bought at the Greek's, that he conceived the wild idea of declaring himself a Pretender too, in order to get another 100 francs.

But the time of the eleventh Yelizavetgrad Government was running out. The usual flurry descended on the town; carts loaded high with goods started moving towards the toll-gates; everything reminded one of Moscow at the beginning of the summer holidays in the good old days. We, too, wearied by events and compromised by Jurenito's monarchistic enterprise, decided to take a holiday. Where the enemy was coming from and who precisely the enemy was we did not know. We set off at hazard and, that same night, after covering about fifteen miles, found ourselves in a village held by the Red Army. We pulled the old but still respectable Soviet warrants from the linings of our coats and, after safely passing through nine 'O.O.'s' (Special Departments), proceeded northwards to Moscow.

OUR JOURNEY lasted seven weeks; often, instead of travelling in goods wagons, we had to save our skins by striking out across marsh and trackless waste. Instead of Schmidt's charts we saw a country resembling a monstrous bog, where rebellions, like the tremblings of a feverish body, sprang up and were put down; a country of intolerable poverty, replying to all speeches, appeals and manifestoes by the same indestructible 'what's that you say?'—the response of apathy, ignorance and death.

Weak with hunger, we wandered from village to village, begging in vain for a slice of bread, giving away waistcoats, hats, watch-chains for a jug of milk. Even Monsieur Delet's trinkets—Faith, Hope and Charity—were exchanged, all three together, for a single egg, which turned out to be addled. Aysha let us down completely, for instead of exchanging goods the peasants would either break into headlong flight or, bravely, begin to pursue the 'unclean Arab'. However, sometimes we were able to overcome their lack of confidence, and the peasants would chat with us amiably and give us maize or millet biscuits for a mere shirt or leather wallet.

I was much surprised to see, in that starving countryside, the black, rich, weed-grown, unsown soil. The peasants we spoke to, on the other hand, found this very natural and even assured us that next year they'd sow still less: 'Just enough so as not to starve. What's the use of sowing—they'll take it away anyhow.'

'Try to understand,' the Teacher explained. 'A hundred million "what's that you say's" are being expected to make a tremendous, selfless, superhuman effort for the sake of an idea they cannot understand. Who demanded their obedience in former times? The landlord, the merchant, the Tsar: but behind them all stood God with a whole scale of intermediaries, starting with the Queen of Heaven and ending with the village

beadle. God never took anything away: He borrowed, promising to make ample return in the next world. His solvency was unquestionable. All the ascetics, the hermits, the poor, merely exchanged the corruptible treasure of forty or fifty years' doubtful earthly joys for the "eternal gold" of heaven. Now it's been revealed to them that the only thing that matters is those forty years: the bread, the marzipan which the parasites used to eat, the featherbeds, our women, our theatres, in short this thrice-dear, beloved earth. Your Mayakovsky's put it very nicely:

*We're sick of the sweets of heaven,  
Give us good rye bread to eat.  
We're sick of paper passions,  
Let us lie with our own warm wives.*

'But, instead of immediate carefree hours with your wife and a good chunk of bread, you're offered a mere couple of ounces—and even that looks pretty stale—overtime—"working Saturdays", "working Sundays"—incessant duties: the same vows of poverty, the same hairshirt all over again, only this time there's no promissory note on the Kingdom of Heaven; on the contrary, they guarantee worms in the grave and demand absolute disinterestedness. Someone—your children, children's children, grandchildren, grandchildren's grandchildren—will have a better life. Justice? But that's an abstraction, promises unsupported by any guarantee. Idealistic materialism has turned out to be a hundred times higher and more difficult than materialistic idealism. How can you wonder if the hundred millions haven't all become super-saints? Be surprised, rather, that thousands of new saints *have* been found, great self-immolators whose dream is not to fly to heaven with the smoke of their burning bodies but only to give a little heat to the frozen countryside.'

In the train we got into conversation with a shop assistant from Maly-Yaroslavets, an unprepossessing hunchback. He attacked communism in a highly original fashion: 'What am I? A monster. An insect with a human being's passport. In the



old days at least I had one hope: I'd get rich, stuff my pockets with hundred-rouble notes, then I'd get my own back. Perhaps you'll say money can't buy everything. You're wrong, believe me. She may find me repulsive but she'll dote on me, don't you worry, she'll kiss my hump and the boil on it. And now what is there for me? Work for my rations? Equality? Let them first make sure that everyone's born nice and equal, good-looking, you know, and strong. All right, for eight hours of work you get one and a half herrings. But who'll pay for my hump, my humiliation, my constant misery, I ask you? There's only one thing left: I'll join the Cheka and no one'll dare to say a word against me. What I'll get out of it won't be more than what other people pick up free. I shan't become a Cheka man out of greed but in the name of holy equality'.

The whole thing put me into a state of such depression that I longed more than ever before for the Teacher's cheerful and elevating words. But he frowned and was silent. I had known him to go through such periods before, but then he had been busy working on his projects; now he openly expressed fatigue, indifference and boredom. I became alarmed. Perhaps he was ill? Jurenito smiled: 'I'm not Monsieur Delet. You can't put my affairs right with Pink pills'.

Only once did he comfort and encourage us. Having acquired a tiny roll of white bread at an enormous price we shared it out fairly into five thin slices and carefully picked up all the crumbs. The Teacher said: 'Rejoice, my friends, for you are experiencing the greatness of human labour, the sacredness of that which is created by horny hands. Do you remember Paris before the war, suffocating with an excess of superfluous things, weary with work that was like the prisoner's pouring dried peas from one container into another? Who, then, could have understood the height, the brilliance, the divine nature of a bread roll or a boot? 'Today, pristine joy has been restored to you and, having lost a hundred false ideals, you have gained possession of that which truly deserves worship. You used to trample the blessed earth and scan the skies, not those known

to the astronomer, but painted by any fraud not too lazy for the job. Yet at your feet lay gladness, happiness, delight, these white crumbs resembling the finest stars. You used to despise labour and admire the mumbling loafers droning out their tales of Eden and Atlantis, yet incapable of sewing a button on their trousers. Now an expert hand has done the useful work of sifting the false stones from the precious'.

Those words were the only lighthouse during many months at sea. The Teacher fell silent once more. Heavy with new disillusionments, we alighted on the dirty platform of the station in Moscow.

## CHAPTER XXXIII | Of heroism, of boredom and particularly of the aeroplane which wouldn't fly

WE ARRIVED IN MOSCOW towards ten o'clock in the morning. Coming out on the square we saw long processions of Soviet office workers going to their offices with sacks to carry their rations. Now and then cars with important personages and horse-sleighs bearing comrades not below the rank of People's Commissariat Departmental Chief would race by.

At Food Distribution Point No. 93, pickled cabbage and a pound of salt were being distributed against coupon No. 107. A long queue of women, old men, children and officials running the risk of being late at committee meetings stood silently with their little sledges at the entrance.

An old woman was pasting up *Izvestia* on the wall, and a long-haired character—one of the 'opposition' to judge by his sarcastic smile—was reading the latest article on world revolution, slowly freezing to death and shifting his weight from one foot to the other. A young lady was selling three caramels, but everybody—except for us, who had the silly notion of asking the price—obviously knew that they were going for three thousand roubles, and walked past quickly, looking away. Only a small boy could not take his eyes off those caramels, his pupils quite pale with ecstasy.

Everyone knew, too, what awaited them—the former readers of *Russkiye Vedomosti*—today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow. The task for today was to draw up a new budget based on the old figures in such a way that the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection passed it; send back empty-handed the 100 delegates from the provinces who had come for books or machinery; draw up a report on last month's inactivity and a plan for the inactivity of the next; in short, to create an

impression of feverish work by marking time, shuffling, dragging your feet and mumbling under your breath. This would be followed by dinner consisting of water and *psha* for the first course and *psha* and water for the second, then cranberry tea with 'Red Star' saccharine bought for a month's salary. Then, together with your wife, you would lower your voice and criticise the Soviet power, dream of paradise lost and *Einem* pastries. Finally, sleep in a frosty hole of a bedroom behind curtains smelling of dog. All this was written on their faces, whose features no longer differed from those of the lower classes.

The Teacher said: 'Don't you notice a smell of humdrum day-to-day existence hereabouts? It doesn't matter that it's a poor existence so far; one day they'll be better fed. Rejoice, Monsieur Delet: people here are no longer walking on their heads but on ordinary, though severely emaciated legs.'

It is true that, this time, those among us who were most pleased to be back in Moscow were the fiercest enemies of the revolution, Mr Cool and Monsieur Delet. With a courtesy worthy of Paris or London they were declared 'guests of the Soviet Republic', housed in a good hotel, fed on meat cutlets and invited to a gala box at the Bolshoy Theatre to see *Les Sylphides*. All this, including the classical *pas* of the ballerinas, proved to their entire satisfaction; they became swollen-headed and took to speaking contemptuously, not only to us, but to the Teacher himself. Once Monsieur Delet brought me half a meat cutlet—which he had left unfinished owing to the inadequate action of a Pink pill—as I waited in the corridor, and said: 'Here's a noble gesture of the Republic's guest!' Since they considered us worthy of only the briefest remarks I was unable to establish exactly what their occupations were apart from those I have already mentioned. I found out only that Mr Cool played bridge of an evening with high-ranking officials with whom he also negotiated major concessions—a half of Turkestan, perhaps, or an eighth of Siberia. Monsieur Delet suggested that the Teacher might approach the same officials on the

subject of the Universal Necropolis, but Jurenito refused with a short but expressive 'Enough!'

Ercole's position, on the other hand, was no longer what it had been. He came to see us in a state of the utmost dejection.

'A thousand devils! How things change! They found me out! Some fellow—a controller or whatever you call them—came along and neither Jupiter nor the Triton were any use at all. They told me, Ercole Bambucci, to go to work! And what work, do you suppose? Letting off squibs? Hanging out flags? Not a bit of it. Productive labour! The bloodsuckers! The Jesuits! What's the use of the Soviets, in that case? What's the difference between this and Germany? They've given me something called a labour book and entered in it that I had a pair of old trousers and a waiter's coat issued to me, and now they want to enter how many hours work I've done. But before they can do that, the idiots, I'd have to *do* some work! May the Capitol collapse before that!'

Alexey Spiridonovich, after his experience at Dyrky, stopped waiting for the generals and the Allies. His only hope now was that the communists would give in completely to the voice of conscience, reopen the delicatessen shops and remove the ban on the publication of *Ruskiye Vedomosti*. Then everything would be perfect.

Aysa and I, like honest citizens, went back to our former jobs: he devoting his efforts to the African revolution and I to the rabbits, which, owing to Durov's outstanding energy, had become far more politically conscious in my absence.

But, alas, my work failed to satisfy me and I was not happy. I would sit in my little room and conduct long metaphysical arguments with myself on what was preferable: cold or smoke? Inclining towards the latter I would go out into the yard, quietly pinch a few logs delivered to my neighbour—the owner of a shop dealing in unrationed goods such as saccharine and frozen apples—chop them up and, with much difficulty, light my little stove. The frozen walls would begin to thaw and I on my bed would gradually come to feel like a sailor in a small

boat in the middle of the Arctic Ocean. Then the wind would blow in through the window which served as exit for the stove-pipe, the stove would tremble and cough out clouds of acrid smoke. I, too, would cough, weep and say I was sorry. Then, in despair, I would pull on my sheepskin coat of dubious origin and go out on to the staircase. Perhaps I should go to the House of the Printed Word? There I would find a fish-paste sandwich and a discussion on 'proletarian choral declamation'. Or to the Polytechnic Museum? No sandwiches there, but 26 young poets reading their verses on the *Mass of the Railway Engine*. No, better sit on the stairs, shiver with cold and dream that all this is not in vain, that I, crouching here, am preparing the distant sunrise of the Renascence. I would dream both in prose and in verse, occasionally producing some tolerable iambs:

*How bright will be the noonday of the age of gold,  
How blue the sky after the evil storm!  
The juices of the barbarous vine shall be transformed  
Into the limpid wine of the millennium. . . .*

So the days passed. Never before had I led a life so poor and honest, so spiritual and chaste. The whole of Moscow seemed to me like a monastery with a strict rule, with perpetual fasting, masses and penances. The boredom itself had something heroically saintly about it. Only a heart smothered in layers of fatty tissue could fail to admire the touching greatness of this insane people which had shouted its message of the advent of paradise, the descent of heavenly stars on earth into a rainy autumn night, and then, buried by the blizzard, had fallen silent, stoically chewing its last handful of grain, yet refusing to come to the bonfire at which many an apostle had warmed himself in the past.

The Teacher was not employed anywhere and did no work. He smoked *makhorka* all day and stared ahead with dull, unseeing eyes. To me he said: 'The poet Shershenevich has written a book called *A Horse Like Any Other Horse*. If you carry on with that idea you could very amusingly write another

called *A State Like Any Other State*. Mr Cool enjoys general esteem. Ercole's an office messenger. The loose cigarettes and the packets of carrot coffee are stamped with the coat of arms of the mutinous republic, the R.S.F.S.R. The French have written Liberty—Equality—Fraternity on the walls of their prisons; here, on the ten-thousand-rouble bonds with which the speculators and contractors are stuffing their pockets, the revolutionary slogan is "Workers of the world, unite". I can't go on looking at this aeroplane which will not fly. It's a bore. But take no notice. It's possible to take the opposite view of all this. One day I realised it and was tempted to poach on your preserves: I wrote a little poem. Listen:

*No, there's no riot in Russia, there's no rebellion.  
Her banners are the sceptre of her power,  
And, thousand-handed, she is laying the foundations  
Of a new world.  
No matter if the day's work is dirty,  
No matter if the East is steeped in blood,  
The giant butterfly is fluttering in anguish  
Breaking its way through the ugly cocoon.  
And in the wretched papers of the Sovnarhoz,  
Under the Red Army man's bayonet, amid ink and blood,  
In unbearable pain, the miraculous rose is waiting to open,  
The rose of invincible love. . . .*

'And so on. I thought of sending it to Schmidt in the *Sovnarhoz*, but decided he might take offence at the "wretched" and tore it up. Fiddle-dee-dee! The point is, Ehrenburg, I've got to die, for my work is done'.

In terror and dismay I was unable to utter a single word, but could only, gripping the Teacher's knee, shake my head senselessly as Jurenito continued:

'I'm sick of the whole thing, utterly and completely sick of it. But to die, strange though it may seem, is quite a difficult undertaking. One idiot calls me his "guide", another his "partner", the third his "friend", the fourth his "comrade",

## CHAPTER XXXIV | Death of the Teacher

IT WAS THE WAY of the Cross. There is a meaning and a greatness in the passing of worlds, epochs and men. I knew that the Teacher was adding the last stone to the astounding edifice of his life; that, for posterity, his death would be the solemn and inevitable full-stop on a page which could not but have been the last. Yet I loved him with a simple animal love, as only a dog can love a man who has picked it up in the street as a mangy blind puppy. Thus, faithful to that feeling, I forgot to think of posterity, and, paying no attention to our embarrassed fellow-passengers, threw back my head and howled long and hopelessly.

Why do I now write of my grief, my weakness? After all, it is not in order to communicate my pitiful experience that I am throwing this great book into the unexplored void. This is the story of the great Teacher, not of his weak, insignificant, contemptible disciple. Ilya Ehrenburg, author of mediocre poems, journalist who had written himself out, coward and renegade, petty hypocrite, dirty bounder with the soulful eyes of an idealist, was weeping on a railway-carriage bench. Who can bear this offensive, tiresome detail when next to him, in the same carriage, waving his pipe and cracking jokes with Aysha, the man of greatest worth—not of our age, but of all ages—was preparing for death? Be still, base heart, restrain your unseemly beating, do not offend the liturgical purity of this unique agony!

I shall not speak of Aysha's grief, nor of our arrival in the little town which has since become immortal. Everything happened as the Teacher had foreseen.

On March 12th towards evening we were sitting on a bench on the long boulevard leading from the station to the centre of the town. The Teacher, carefully shaven and solemn, had taken us out for a walk. Were it not for his torn coat, I would



have felt myself once more to be the secretary of the Ambassador of Labardan. It even seemed to me in my stupidity that the Teacher had changed his mind and meant, not to die, but to proclaim himself Tsar, President or Negus of some glorious nation. But he addressed us with the following words, his last:

‘Today, very probably, the cupidity of some bandit or other will be aroused by my boots. Comrade Oltenko has told me that robberies in the town are on the increase. Unfortunately, posterity will never know the perpetrator’s name. I see clearly a monument erected in 1980 to the memory of that unknown saviour of States past, present and to come from Julio Jurenito, the Mexican bandit. What a pity I shall not be there to lay a wreath at his feet; a most delightful occupation! To that and many other ends do you, Ehrenburg, betake yourself after my death to some quiet place and year after year, neither sparing your time—which nobody wants—nor knocking up an unnecessary number of lines (you’ve a fondness for that), describe all you know of my life: conversations, work and anecdotes, particularly the last. The blessed anecdote has long since taken the place of the epic and the sermon; it is the key to the treasure-houses of mankind. The book will evoke laughter in the wise and indignation in the foolish. But, to tell the truth, neither the first nor the second will understand very much of it. Then do not grieve over your lack of talent. To understand me is altogether a difficult thing. At the very dawn of this dark, majestic day I was already speaking of the morrow—running ahead like a dog, sniffing, cocking an ear. Alexey Spiridonovich asked me once: did I really detest this life so much? No, it is not hatred but a profound lack of love which has laid waste my heart. Build! Work! Grow! I do not call you back, I do not offer you bombs nor do I counsel you to take off your trousers and become shepherds in the manner of Raymond Duncan. Dear Aysha, believe me, you are the finest of all the men I have ever met in my life. But it will not be your childlike person that will save the world. Ten times already you have

gone out to "save culture"; you have your job in the sub-department; you have a liking for fountain pens and gramophones. In short—the sequence of the seasons, and so forth. In order that the world's spiral should soar to new happiness it is necessary to describe the circle of the ages, the circle of blood, sweat, coal, the iron circle.

'I see the noon of this new day. The Parthenon will be remembered as a pitiful childish plaything in the dining-rooms of those giant States. The structure of any pumping station will put the Gothic cathedrals to shame. A simple *pissoir* in the street will exceed the pyramid of Cheops in the majesty of its concrete, the virgin purity of its glass. It shall be so. Here, in poverty-stricken, ruined Russia I speak of it. For it is not those who have a superfluity of stones that build, but those who are not afraid to bind the stones together with their living blood. I foresee it, but I am not glad.

'In my last hours I should like to see something else, the next stage, the thing still shrouded in mists. Here comes a man with a file of papers. On his hip, in a special pocket, he carries a Browning. Don't be afraid, he isn't a bandit, he's an honest official. This morning, having typed something under a serial number, he has shot a man who disagreed with him on some issue or another. Now he has dined and is briskly walking to a meeting. Do you see the cat at his side? It, too, has most probably eaten a mouse today. Let me bow down before the cat, before Aysha, before the absence of serial numbers, and look ahead: can it be that there are no cats there but only serial numbers, more serial numbers, even cats classified under serial numbers? The world is closed to man. What's Mars to him—and not only Mars, but even, say, the nature of the horse? He only thinks of stars when he's in love, and then only as of a specially provided heavenly illumination. New worlds, to him, are the preparations for an expedition to the South Pole. He has separated himself, locked himself in, and in the harmony of the process of being he has lost his own harmony. A man can be made to walk on a tightrope, but as soon as the audience

has gone he will come slap down on the soft sand of the arena. Outside harmony there is no freedom, no love, no defeat of death. Either it's Mr Cool exterminating Aysha by scientific means, like a cockroach, or it's Aysha, in the intimate circle of his family, lurching off Mr Cool's thigh. Or else both of them will be harnessed under one yoke and, hating each other, everybody and everything, they will pull the festive chariot of "liberated mankind". Either it's Ercole left to his own devices, scratching his navel in the via Pascudini, or it's Schmidt's eternal military parade. They run from death, they seek it, but no one goes simply to sleep, all of them twitch and jump. Instead of love there's an accounts ledger—of intimacy, help, betrayal, estrangement; there's love, not of an object but of one's own feeling, warming one's own coldness—according to good King David's prescription—on the heart of another. Outside harmony there's no life but only the great existence of men and races. Remember Monsieur Delet? He, too, used to speak of harmony. For him it meant a sensible diet, the simple mean of all, the basic units of the world. Of course I'm not speaking of that but of a sense which man has lost and which is yet needed for a beautiful life, a sense of the concord of the entire universe.

'I don't know how it will be achieved—in the laboratory, on the waste ground left after the fires of the elemental disaster, or by the last effort of the rational will. I don't know when it will come, that hour of liberty, joy and thoughtlessness. I know that it will come; and I know, too, that for it to come it is necessary to hasten the inevitable hour-hand of the events, the wars, the revolutions, of this day for which I have no love.

'Do it as best you can. As for me, I don't feel like it any longer. I'm full right up, my stomach feels heavy, in short, a case of colossal indigestion which would shake even our Delet. Farewell, my friends! Take care of your health. Make no fuss over my body. Another thing: when you get back to Moscow, eat plenty of yoghurt; it's unrationed, and highly recommended for immortality.'

Having finished speaking the Teacher ate a frozen pear, wiped his forehead with a big red silk handkerchief, gave Aysha a kiss and me a well-smoked meerschaum cigarette holder and, ordering us to remain on the bench, walked off down the deserted road. I shivered and whimpered.

Soon we heard someone give a loud shout, then a whistle and the crack of a shot nearby. Aysha started to run after the Teacher. I crawled under the bench, pulled up my legs and lay very still.

A quarter of an hour later I climbed out and decided to go and see. A hundred paces from the bench I found the Teacher lying in a ditch with blood on his face. He was dead, the boots were gone from his cold, forlorn-looking feet. I fell down at his side, without letting go of those feet in their darned striped socks. Here lay what had been my all.

Aysha came running, flourishing his big African knife. He had tried to catch up with the murderer, but in vain. What should we do with the Teacher? Surely not call the militiamen, exchanging the great mystery for a vile criminal report? Taking advantage of the darkness and the absence of people, we carried the Teacher's body to a field beyond the town and there, using Aysha's knife, dug a hole all night.

When everything around us began to tremble in the approaching dawn, the grave was ready, and the dim strip of the first light seemed to remind us of the Teacher's prophecies. I found a stick, knocked it in and hung up my labour card—there was nothing else at hand—on which I had written: "Attention! Here lies the Teacher of Humanity, Julio Jurenito, murdered on March 12th 1921 at 8.20 p.m.". Today, surely, there is no trace left of his holy grave.

Whilst we were working, the effort and petty worries shielded me from what had happened. But when we returned to the station and I realised that we would leave without the Teacher, that never again would I hear his dear, steady voice, I cried aloud with pain. In vain did Aysha try to calm me, saying that Jurenito was now a god, that he would live in other men. All this was

pitiful babbling, unworthy of his name. I knew he was dead, for good, for ever. And I remained, and I had no boots, and even if I had had any I would hide them, hide myself, go on living somehow. . . . What was to be done?

Demented, I rushed towards a woman selling hot pies and, upsetting her stall, began to shout: 'Don't you understand, the Teacher's dead, dead for a pair of boots! I'll not survive it!'

As the reader will realise, this remark was not a real threat but only an image expressing the boundlessness of my grief.

They gave me a beating and took me to the Commissariat, but in the evening they let me out again and we took the train to empty Moscow, into a world which had lost the right to turn, to revolve, to rush ahead; a world without meaning, without end. . . .

For which, quite obviously,  
there is no need

PERHAPS I SHOULD STOP at the Teacher's death and not begin this chapter, dreary and dull without the radiance of his presence. But it seems to me that the reader might be interested in a brief account of what happened to the men who accompanied the Teacher during his passage on earth. Besides, everything I have seen in Europe has so shaken my frail imagination that I do not think I can conceal the emotional and unbalanced condition which preceded the writing of this book. That is why I have decided to make the clumsy addition of a thirty-fifth and final chapter to the graceful structure.

On my return to Moscow I summoned together our whole company to announce the Teacher's death. We gathered in his room, and his affectionate, mocking presence seemed to be with us all the time. Alexey Spiridonovich wept bitterly as he remembered all his disagreements with the Teacher, his moments of mistrust, weakness and faithlessness: 'I am a perjurer,' he cried, 'and may that bandit be branded as a regicide!'. Monsieur Delet could not bear to hear my story of the hole in the ground and the stick I had knocked in: 'Such a respectable man, my partner, and yet he gets something worse than Class Sixteen! A country of barbarians, that's all I have to say!'

Grieving and weeping, remembering the Teacher's words and habits, we passed, little by little, to the question of our future. Despite our various affairs and occupations, the main thing which had united us and kept us in Moscow had been the Teacher's presence. Mr Cool, though he had got a certain amount of business going, was not averse to exchanging the meat cutlets of a 'guest of the Republic' for Vattel's oysters and crabs, for which he had a special fondness. Monsieur Delet sighed every minute for his beautiful country: *la belle, la douce*

*France*, for Zizi, Lucie and the sweet peas. Ercole, too, was missing the Roman sun, the wine and the shop sign in the via Pascudini. Alexey Spiridonovich did not miss anything in particular and despised the needs of the flesh, but longed to emigrate in order to 'save the freedom of the spirit from the corrupters and violators'. I could not rise to the same heights as he, and the greatest lure remained, for me, a cup of rotten coffee with a glass of cheap *marc* on the terrace of my never-to-be-forgotten Rotonde.

But when I turned with yearning to the West, it was not entirely without idealistic motive. For all my narrow egoism and the predominance of animal instincts, I was conscious of my duty to humanity: had not the Teacher charged me with writing the story of his mysterious and edifying life? And writing in Moscow, or anywhere in Russia for that matter, was extremely difficult. A lot of time was taken up, if not by the rabbits themselves, then by the commissions devoted to them, the business of obtaining various rations and getting hold of a quarter of a pound of tobacco on the black market. Even the paper necessary for so voluminous a work would be very hard to find. Furthermore, I had lost a lot of weight and could hardly concentrate on the Teacher's elevated problems. Finally, the atmosphere of history in the making was not conducive to the chronicler's quiet labours. I knew that it would be enough for me to get to the Rotonde, drink a few glasses, call *garçon, de quoi écrire!* and my quick hand would start at once recording the Teacher's sacred preachings on the coffee-bespattered sheets. As for Aysha, he was so helpless, so orphaned without his master that he was prepared to follow us no matter where.

So it was that all of us, introduced by the Teacher into the purgatory of the Revolution, now longed to return to the cosy hell or, if such a definition should appear unwise, to the unaired paradise. To do this was not so simple, but luckily Schmidt, too, was going abroad, guided—it is true—by special considerations which he concealed from us. With his help we managed

to obtain the necessary passports and, two weeks later, we were devouring fat pork chops in a good restaurant in Riga, one chop after another, all of us—even Monsieur Delet—having for the moment lost every trace of moderation.

Our jaws, and dozens of others all around, were working in unison, with resonance and solemnity. The sleepy musicians were conscientiously pumping out the latest hit tune. Mr Cool beckoned, as to a dog, to a modest-looking young lady, gave her a dollar and obtained everything due to him for the price. Monsieur Delet entered into conversation with some neighbours on political themes, was deeply touched to hear of Germany letting the Allies have some milch cows, and murmured: 'Justice has triumphed!'. It was a night of joys and reconciliations, wide, soft embraces, arms opening to receive the prodigal son. Mr Cool expressed all our feelings when he raised his glass of *ersatz* champagne and proclaimed: 'Friends, let us drink to the triumph of civilisation!'

Excited, I went out on the balcony for a breath of fresh air. Here she was again, wise, eternally beautiful Europe. The noise of mastication, the perky accents of the band and the sucking sounds of kissing were dying down to a tender silence. Everything was gradually drowned by a majestic snore, a snore embellished by whistling, grunting and wheezing. Monsieur Delet—Riga—all Europe, having dined and squirmed awhile on the marriage bed, having earned its daily bread and done its best to take away the daily bread of others—for 'man does not live by bread alone'—was peacefully asleep. I gave way completely to my pent-up feelings and began to sing *Hush-a-bye-baby*, but misjudged the power of my own voice. A waiter came and asked me to stop, as I was disturbing all twenty of the establishment's private rooms.

A few days later there began a series of touching good-byes, tears and promises to send picture postcards. To leave, it is true, was not altogether easy, for Europe had, during the time of our absence, become enriched by an institution which, though tiresome, was absolutely rational, namely that of visas. After



all, chains on front doors, vigilant house-porters and closely inspected visiting cards have existed for a long time past. If the ordinary citizen shows such caution, would it not be madness on the part of a State to let strangers enter its gates without previously ascertaining whether their faces are attractive, their convictions suitable and their wallets well-filled? Owing to this innovation we did not leave all at once but gradually, thus confirming the justice of the hierarchy of nations.

Mr Cool and Monsieur Delet, of course, departed in a first-class carriage; and, when all the others had gone their various ways, Alexey Spiridonovich and I still stayed behind for a long, long time, standing for the appointed number of hours in the queues in waiting-rooms of the consulates of powers great and small. However, we ourselves were conscious of the justice of such discrimination, and Alexey Spiridonovich when asked his nationality, would reply, as though apologizing, with a vague gesture:

‘Oh, you know . . . a country . . . Eastern Europe . . .’

But mercy, not vengeance, was the watchword of the cultured nations, and after standing in queues for the appointed length of time even we received our visas. I shook the hand of the consulate porter—who, in the course of a month, had had time to get used to me as to a piece of furniture—I bowed once more in reverence before glorious Chinara who had received an oak leaf in her lap, and was about to speak of this to the porter, but remembered that the country of Ronsard has no love for barbarian poets and went out quietly.

And so the wheel had turned full circle: I was going to Paris, my dear, beloved Paris, Paris regained.

After many years of war and revolution, the entire journey was to me a single continuous demonstration of the triumph of peace, order, reason and civilisation.

I stayed a week in hospitable Copenhagen, and though—due to my innate sobriety of outlook—I failed to notice the mystic quality made famous by Bang, I was indeed shaken

by the wealth of shop-windows and the excess of foods. All the people I saw in the street were fat, red-faced and cheerful. After my Moscow reflections I experienced a sense of reverent admiration in front of every rounded paunch swaying regularly inside its snug waistcoat. At the Tivoli Café I saw a waiter, before pouring himself out a cup of coffee, rinse it first with thick, rich cream. This electrifying sight so impressed me that I actually rose from my seat. Somewhere far away, in Vienna or in Petersburg, thousands of children were dying at that very moment for lack of milk, while here it flowed, as in Arcadia, unwanted by anyone. Here they had no revolutions, made no attempt to reshape the world, but honourably engaged in trade, passed laws in the Rijksgdag and grazed their cows. What an instructive story of the good and the naughty boy for our children! Was it possible, after that, not to cry out in furious anger: down with the heroes, soldiers, poets, revolutionaries, madmen of all colours! Long live the honest tradesman!

In London I went about the streets as in a temple, on tiptoe and hat in hand: once again I was in the true home of law, freedom and the inviolability of the person, the home of *habeas corpus*. What dignity, what independence on the proud faces, even those of junior City clerks! I remembered the English policemen bringing their truncheons down with a crack on the heads of citizens of Batum guilty of infringing the published regulations. Now, in London, I understood that it was the uncultivated Russians, Georgians, Turks who had been at fault, that it was they who did not deserve *habeas corpus* but merited only the profoundly educative truncheon.

My enthusiasm reached its peak when I beheld at last my beloved Montparnasse and the Rotonde. Though manners within it had changed, like those of a man who has reached the age of reason, I yet felt there like a homing-bird. What had been the use of dreaming, suffering, wandering, only to return once more to the little round table with its pile of saucers? But it was here that I became aware of my irrevocable loss with

full intensity. How could I, without the Teacher, comprehend this wine-glass, this city, this whole life? Instead of a well-constructed picture I saw flickering before my eyes the dots of the *pointillistes*, creating an illusion of seeing from afar, yet giving no firm support.

My beloved Paris was still the same as ever. The lights of the cafés and advertisements gleamed like those of a trusty lighthouse lit by the hand of an ever-watchful keeper. The ruby and emerald streams of aperitifs still flowed; deputies, making a heroic effort, still went on overthrowing cabinets; poets wrote faultless verse about women's breasts and hips; desperate revolutionaries smashed the Government—which, however, did not greatly mind—once a week in the smaller journals; and clerks in the savings companies entered new noughts, like milestones, in the savings books neatly covered in brown paper.

But there were many changes as well. The men wore suits with tight waists and big breasts and behinds such as are natural to the other sex: this was explained by the prevailing fashion for love slightly different from the generally accepted variety. In the cabarets and the salons they were dancing a new dance called the fox-trot, based on associative swayings. Finally, the newspapers had started a vogue for the novel and fascinating sport, unknown in former days, of 'Marshal-racing'.

A few days after my arrival I was impressed beyond words by a truly magnificent spectacle. A prize-fight was announced between two famous boxers, a Frenchman and an Englishman. Paris—the capital of the world—and, after it, all the towns of Europe and America awaited the outcome with bated breath. I went with Alexey Spiridonovich to watch this great encounter.

Two very healthy-looking, large men came out into the ring. Everyone grew very still, knowing that the world's destinies were about to be decided.

First the Englishman takes a good swing and hits the Frenchman in the face with all his might. A tooth is knocked out, the

blood flows . . . Alexey Spiridonovich moans: 'Oh God, what are they doing! The face! The countenance! The image of God!' What with all the Tolstoy he's read, the poor fool can no longer appreciate the beauty of war, of national power, of art, of boxing, in short of anything which distinguishes a man from a sheep. Carried away by the fight I abstain from arguing with him. The blows come fast and furious. Each of them is reported at once by wireless to the whole world. Crowds have gathered in front of gigantic screens in London and New York, discussing the weight and significance of the fist which has knocked out the tooth. Bets involving millions of dollars and pounds are made. Aboard the S.S. *Turbanian* in the Pacific Ocean, the passengers jostle each other by the radio receiver, excited by the news that the Frenchman has been hit twice on the chin. I know that at this moment I am in the centre of the universe. But what is this? The Frenchman rallies his strength and, with full force, strikes the Englishman on the nose. The blood spurts. The hefty fellow falls to the ground. A knockout. *Vive la France!* I run out into the square. What jubilation! All the lights are on. Three aeroplanes are flying over Paris, dropping leaflets printed with the glad news. Trumpets are blaring, women are throwing flowers. A true feast of national pride that has been justly satisfied!

After all the joys I had experienced in the preceding days, the prize-fight completely dazed and intoxicated me. I lost my peace of mind. Again I raved like a madman, ready at any moment to fall on the ground and kiss the ancient, grey, beloved paving stones. Then friends whose names I do not know decided to help me. Whoever they may be, of one thing I'm sure: it was love of mankind, of Russian poetry, of myself that guided their hands, and I shall remember those mysterious benefactors as long as life and memory last. They understood that I was weak in body and spirit, that I needed rest and fresh air, and invited me to change my residence forthwith.

I went to hospitable Belgium where, recovering from the surfeit of impressions, I approached the task entrusted to me

by the Teacher. But before I describe my life during those months, let me recount all I know of the destinies of my other friends, disciples of Julio Jurenito.

Mr Cool is still doing business with Russian representatives. In addition, he is making sure that mankind shall enjoy a long peace. Even the ancients knew that to achieve this it is necessary to prepare for war. Mr Cool, as a leading humanitarian of our age, is doing precisely that with his characteristic energy. His newly-equipped factories and shipyards have doubled their output since the war. All the Teacher's inventions of 1915-1916 have been developed. At the same time Mr Cool does not neglect the purely ethical side of things: he writes tracts on the blessings of peace and works in the League of Nations.

I regard his activities as a token of well-being and the peaceful flourishing of nations. Germany has been completely disarmed, not without his assistance, and, of course, other countries will follow suit. And yet, for reasons which escape me, European powers keep mobilising here and there, and semi-savages in Silesia, Lithuania, Turkey and elsewhere persist in following the old paths, unable to grasp the change which has occurred in world affairs.

Mr Cool writes to me: 'I am happy. The power of religion is growing stronger. The dollar is stable. All the shells made at my factories are stamped with the olive branch of peace. May they one day carry the good news to all countries, islands and continents'.

Monsieur Delet, too, is getting on pretty well. He recovered very quickly from his shattering experiences and, without reviving the Necropolis, became the head of an undertaking called the Veni-Vidi-Vici Agency which organises trips to the scenes of recent fighting. Many Americans, English and French of both sexes, who only a few years ago avoided the front like the plague, have now come to their senses and regard it with the liveliest curiosity. In the North of France there still remains a wide strip of territory totally ravaged by the fighting, with wrecked fortifications, scraps of barbed wire, agglomera-

tions of crosses. Its ruined, pitiful inhabitants live herded together in wretched huts. Monsieur Delet became aware at once of the high patriotic and commercial interest of such excursions. A group of gentlemen and ladies leave Paris in comfortable cars. At Verdun they examine the ruins and cemeteries and have a good lunch. Then they continue on their way. At places where the fighting was particularly fierce, Monsieur Delet has installed cafés where you can drink iced orangeade and send a picture postcard to friends at home. Then there's dinner at Rheims (where souvenirs made of shell splinters are sold) and a comfortable return journey.

'My friend,' he writes to me, 'I have rediscovered the sweetness of life. My propaganda work for heroism and self-sacrifice is not merely profitable but also truly great. My little house still stands, requiring only minor repairs. I have engaged as my housekeeper a very young girl, Mlle Gabrielle from Arcahon. Don't be sorry for me, I'm very brisk and full of *élan*. "How terrible is life!" cried King Oedipus (Mlle Gabrielle took me to the Comédie Française last night, it was her birthday; she's a serious girl but well up in other things too). But my cry is: "How beautiful is life!".'

Fate has been less kind to Ercole. Even in Riga he was arrested, for, coming to a first-class restaurant and having consumed an abundant meal, he did not, of course, pay his bill and—to make matters worse—threatened the management that he would organise such a *Sovieto* there and then that even the tables would take to their heels. On that occasion they let him go. But recently in the *Giornale d'Italia* I read that during a clash between socialists and fascists a certain Ercole Bambucci had been arrested in the via Pascudini in Rome. This individual had fired at both sides and, when questioned, had replied that he sympathised with everyone equally but loved disorder and Bengal lights best of all things in the world.

Of Schmidt, too, I hear only through the newspapers. He was arrested by the German police during the latest unsuccessful *putsch*.

Aysha's got a rather unusual job: Madame Jobe, wife of a contractor grown rich during the war, employs him as tutor to her favourite dog, a Brussels spitz called Victoire. Aysha has to instil in Victoire a love of order, take her out for walks, clean her teeth with a toothbrush and give her mud baths, for Victoire suffers from sciatica.

Madame Jobe recently came to Ostende and Aysha and I were able to meet. He devotes himself to his work with the same zeal as, a year ago, he put into the Propaganda Sub-Department. With pride and admiration he showed me the special dog's goloshes he puts on Victoire's feet in wet weather. I fully shared his feelings. Can anyone, confronted with those goloshes, deny the existence of world progress? Sceptics will say that the children of many unemployed lack a good pair of shoes. A coarse and stupid judgment worthy of no attention. What matters is not quantity but quality. Barefooted children there always were and always will be, but had the ignorant Middle Ages such things to show as dogs' goloshes and dogs' tutors? We are moving forward!

Poor Alexey Spiridonovich has fared worse than that. With open heart he approached the Russian émigrés, but his reception was far from friendly. Of course it was his own fault in many ways. For example, he started recounting the boring story of his life to a certain worthy academician, who, however, cut him short at once with the question: 'Those are all petty details, tell me rather how the Commissars make soup out of infants' fingers?'. Alexey Spiridonovich replied that, though the Bolsheviks were certainly barbarians, he was hearing about the soup for the first time and could offer no information whatsoever. The academician lost his temper: 'Would you mind stating your religion?'.  
'Russian orthodox.'

'And to what social class do you belong?'.  
'The nobility.'

This seemed so utterly improbable that it evoked a long, scornful grimace worthy of the best of the Academies.

A few days later an émigré newspaper published the news that the Bolshevik Tishin had been a Cheka Commissar in Samarkand and had tortured the local shopkeepers with sugar-tongs. Alexey Spiridonovich, indignant, wrote a letter to the editor at once, but—no doubt from excitement—used the reformed alphabet. On reading this the editor became quite convinced of his own fabrication.

Alexey Spiridonovich was obliged to go into hiding. Nevertheless he longed for intercourse with honest Russian émigrés of the group called *The Hour is At Hand*. Learning from experience, he made no protest against finger-soup but even outlined methods of preparing it. But the émigrés, who consisted of democratic members of the Black Hundreds and monarchistic socialists, were very busy and had little time to spare for intimate friendship.

In the mornings they would stand through long memorial services for crowned persons. Then they would go to see various nice Rumanians and Poles and try to convince them of the immediate necessity to wipe out all the Bolsheviks, among whom there wasn't a single Russian. In the evenings they would read in the paper that the Japanese had killed a Russian, whisper in each other's ears 'probably a Bolshevik' and hug themselves with delight. At night they would industriously consume *caviare russe* and drink champagne to the coming 'Renaissance', to the great General and to that modest but honourable worker, the policeman.

Alexey Spiridonovich found life in this company fairly hard going: he was fond of memorial services, it is true, but he was terrified of the Japanese and hadn't enough money for caviare. In fact he hadn't enough money even for bread. He searched for a job in vain and, starving, looked back longingly even at *psha*. Finally, he struck up an acquaintance with a private detective in the street and found a post which, though it carried material security, caused him dreadful moral torment.

He is living in the flat of a certain Madame Diercks, sleeping in a dark, secret closet, and no one but the lady herself knows



of his existence. This strange way of life is by no means due to the vices of Madame Diercks, but, on the contrary, to her excessive desire for family happiness. Her husband is a very frivolous character and Alexey Spiridonovich has to follow him everywhere and report all he sees to Madame Diercks.

Let me quote an extract from my friend's letter which will sum up his mental condition: ' . . . my brother, where are you? I perish! I will not speak of the simple fear that my master, or rather, my mistress's husband, will find me out at last, will insult me (deservedly!), will beat me. But why, why did I flee from the murderers of the human spirit? Was it in order to watch whether this red-haired stockbroker isn't being unfaithful to his better half? Where's life? Where are the holy ideals? They're spat upon, trodden underfoot, destroyed! O how right was Jurenito when he proved to me that nothing exists, not even—oh, horrible!—man. He has gone away into non-being, into Lethe, into Nirvana, and I am left behind. Tell me, what must I do? Why should I live?'

Receiving this letter I, too, began to hesitate and wonder. My initial transports of joy had meanwhile cooled down. I began asking myself whether I was not, after all, betraying the Teacher. My friends' letters, the dark memories of recent years and, finally, the immoderate development of culture troubled and oppressed me. I even went so far as to find in a shop a pair of boots resembling those which had relieved the Teacher of his life, and wrote several poems for a posthumous edition. But I pulled myself together quickly, knowing that a great task lay before me: that of telling the story of the Teacher's life.

Now the book is finished. My heart is empty and at rest. I have lived again through the past, year by year, and have restored the Teacher's image, which had already begun to pale. I am no longer afraid that I might betray the unforgettable Traitor. No longer do I run like a coward from insurmountable contradictions, for they were of the essence of the Teacher's life. Russia, France, war, revolution, satiety, rebellion, famine

and repose pass in review before my eyes. I do not argue; neither do I worship. I know that there are many chains, of different metals and of various shapes, but all are chains, and to none of them will I extend my feeble hand.

A fair abundance of grey hairs, frequent palpitations of the heart and general debility are my consolation. I have broken the back of life, and the hour may not be too distant when I shall no longer have to wake, wash, dine, write, nor even to remember. My duty is done: the book is written. I know that it will repel all those who hitherto, out of excessive love of literature or a sense of commiseration, still tried in vain to understand or justify me. What consul now will stamp my passport with a visa? What mother will allow me to cross the threshold of her home, where honest youths and pure girls are growing up? Loneliness and rejection await me. In this tale of true events, this confession of sincere emotions, the doubting Thomases who know no mercy will see a vile lampoon, and my very name will come under contempt. Let it be so! I have led a bad life, and a happy sunset would be no more than an absurd and offensive dissonance.

The life around me today is quiet and smooth, as if it had been thus for a thousand years. In the mornings someone downstairs plays the piano. Then they ring the gong for lunch. I go, I eat my soup, my meat and potatoes, my stewed fruit. The ladies living at the *pension* point at me: 'an odd person'. I say nothing, I smoke my pipe, I walk a little, I read a little, something like Rony's tales of adultery or Einstein's Theory of Relativity in a popular edition. Then I wind my watch, put my pipe down on the bedside table and go to bed.

Such is my life; not a good life. But I am not ashamed nor hopeless. Of course I'll die without ever beholding those wild fields with the dancing, the raucous cries, the child-like, mindless laughter of men set free at last. And yet, today, I am casting forth the seed of the fleabane, the wild mint, the ragwort of that far distant future. The inevitable will come, I believe it, and to all those who await it, to all my brothers

without a god, without a programme, without an idea, naked  
and despised, loving only the wind and outrage, I send my  
last kiss. Hurrah! Hip-hip-hip hooray! *Vive! Zivio! Hoch!*  
*Evviva! Banzai!*

**Crash ! Bang !**